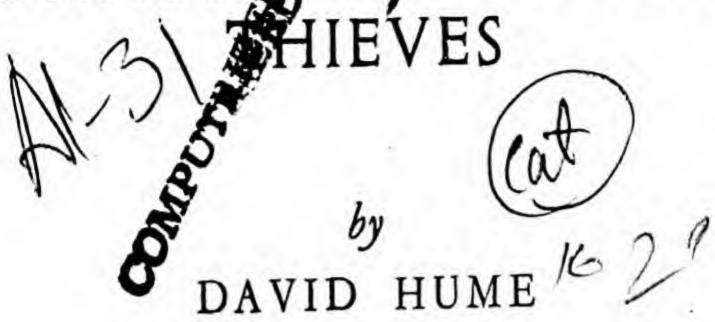
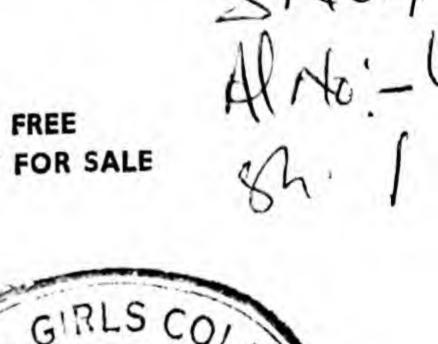
# DISHONQUR AMONG



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COLLINS 14 ST. JAMES'S PLACE LONDON

# A Mick Cardby Mystery

To most people who knew him, Cuthbert Kendal was a commercial traveller—a highly successful salesman. And up to a point they were right. Actually Cuthbert was a traveller in death, violence, and most sidelines in the crime market. He could sell a sudden death or a crooked deal as easily as another traveller could dispose of silk stockings, and he always took a commission that would turn any other knight of the road delirious with envy. It was the tragic shooting of Alicia Armstrong outside her Bayswater flat that first gave him the uncomfortable feeling that Mick Cardby was on his track. It was to be a long chase and a sensationally exciting one before an early breakfast and a long drop in a London gaol brought to an end a career stained with many crimes, and one of Cardby's greatest cases.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# RUNNING INTO TROUBLE

PEOPLE frequently declare that wives know plenty about their men. It does not always work out that way. Mrs. Zena Kendal, for instance, was an odd exception. She thought her man's name was Cuthbert Kendal. It was not. She believed that he was a He was not. She was certain commercial traveller. that he was an honest man. He never could be. Mostly, of course, she was positive that she was his wife. That was because he had quite forgotten to mention the woman he had married at Warrington. Zena had plenty of opinions about her Cuthbert—and most of them were as wrong as anything can be.

Such a state of affairs calls for no mean explanation. Mostly the reason was to be found in the fact that Cuthbert Kendal was no mean artist in the subtle pastime of boxing cleverly. His genius had flowered early in life. He had reached his sixteenth birthday when his father pointed to the front door of their small house, gave his son a single ticket to the wide open spaces, and stated with marked emphasis that a return to the domestic hearth would mean an ambulance for little Cuthbert. Except that his name in those

days was Archie.

For twenty years they received no news of their wandering boy. Then one day they did hear-but that

is really quite a story.

Zena firmly believed that her man was a highly successful salesman. Up to a point she was right. Cuthbert was a traveller in death, violence, and most sidelines in the crime market. He could sell a sudden death or a crooked deal as easily as another traveller could dispose of stockings and what-have-you. But Cuthbert mostly put out his hand for a commission likely to turn any knight of the road delirious with envy.

He was nearly eighteen when he decided that the crime racket looked good. He had by then tried for two years to earn an honest living, he had tried to work, and he found that it hurt him. Other men have made the same discovery, decided that they would have to suffer the injury, and plodded through a life of toil to a humdrum grave. Their consolation and reward, maybe, lay in the fact that the corpse was bedded down in a cemetery instead of a prison yard.

Cuthbert was working as a page boy in a West End hotel when he found that by pilfering in bedrooms he could make more money than the firm paid him. For three months it was a pleasant life. Then a woman caught him red-handed. It looked very much like Borstal for Cuthbert. But when the woman heard about the father who had run away with another woman, about Cuthbert's consumptive mother, and his two small sisters, when she learnt that he only stole to support them, she told him how sorry she was. was sometime before she could persuade Cuthbert to cease sobbing. She said that her husband would find the poor youth a better job. She did. Cuthbert was installed in a textile warehouse. He thanked the woman and her husband while tears coursed down his cheeks. Then he moved out of the warehouse with nearly a thousand pounds' worth of silk, and they didn't hear any more about him. The police were informed. They were most interested. But at the end of a year Cuthbert was merely an unsolved crime. He had discovered the art of boxing cleverly!

He drifted through the underworld of Birmingham, and the "boys" taught him quite a lot. Four of them pulled a fast stroke. Three of them were smacked into gaol. They did not squeal. And Cuthbert had moved on. It was in Warrington that he almost fell in love. The girl was most attractive. So was the fact that her father had sold his business and was worth a small pile of money. Cuthbert decided to separate the father from some of his cash even if it meant marrying the girl. He couldn't see that a marriage meant very much In any case if there was money in the offing.

For nearly six months he was a perfect husband, and

-much more particularly-a devoted son-in-law. The father decided, after some very effective persuasion, to put Cuthbert into a small business. Everything was firmly set. Cuthbert was handed five hundred pounds to buy the small tobacconist's shop upon which he had decided to concentrate the rest of his life. They didn't see Cuthbert any more, they never saw the money again, and they heard nothing further about the business.

Once again the police threw out a dragnet. But they had not been told of the crime by the unsuspecting people until Cuthbert had been on the missing list for a week. And by that time he was admiring the lights on Broadway. His money soon seeped away. Cuthbert was fond of life, and life in New York can be rather more than expensive. So he joined in with a small mob of stick-up artists. They handled half a dozen neat jobs. Then Cuthbert missed a bullet by an inch, and thought he was in the wrong racket. He crossed to the Pacific coast, muscled his way in with a bunch of petermen, and learned what things could be done to a safe with some knowledge and an oxy-acetylene

Two of his colleagues went to the San Quentin cells. Cuthpert went down to Mexico instead. He won the race to the Border with twenty minutes to spare. It was in Mexico City that he first discovered that good money can be gathered by professional murderers. He handled a couple of neat killings. For one of them he drew four thousand dollars. He had shot down an eighteen-year-old girl who was causing a business executive more trouble than he cared to handle. Somebody told Cuthbert that the "cops" handling homicide jobs in Mexico City were hot. He accepted the tip with thanks, and started southwards. For two years he learned crime in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Montevideo and Buenos Aires. He had collected a fair wad of money, and a vast experience. He sailed for England, no home, and an absence of beauty, fervently hoping that the small affair he had staged at Warrington would be buried under the dust of the records.

For a year Cuthbert Kendal-as he was then known

—sat back and surveyed the scene. Also, he got around plenty, although Warrington did not figure in his itinerary. During that time he worked out a plan of campaign. It seemed to his imaginative mind that crime in England lacked one potent weapon. An organiser was required. It seemed only natural to the accomplished Cuthbert that he should select himself to fill the grievous gap. As managing director of a crime combine he felt that he could achieve things, could get places.

At the end of six months' endeavour he had wandered through the crime belt until he had a variety of men in his pocket. They made a mixed grill, Cuthbert intended that they should. He had decided to throw a wide net, and since his scheme for organised crime was all-embracive, he wanted experts from all sections

of the underworld. He got them.

Once Cuthbert Kendal became satisfied that the stage was set he took offices in Cheapside. On the door he had painted the words: "CUTHBERT KENDAL, Manufacturers' Agent." Inside the offices he seated two girls, and saw that they were supplied with plenty of work. He had chosen dames with more looks than sense. They worked without knowing that the letters, the orders, the catalogues, etc., meant nothing in the world of commerce. Kendal wanted a front. He had it. His money was dwindling away. The moment had arrived to cash in. And Cuthbert could achieve that object with celerity. But before he broke into the big money he decided that another front would not do any harm. His office was ace high. It gave him the right commercial atmosphere. Yet there was always a bare chance that the lads from the City Police, or from the Yard, might start making a few insolent inquiries. That would mean that he required the background of a sober and eminently respectable private life.

He met a woman named Zena Caley. She had a passable face, a figure good enough under a heavy coat, and a family history of respectability stretching back to the days when all her male relatives were parsons, lay preachers, and such like. Cuthbert thought the woman had the personality of a dead cod, the sex

appeal of a monument. Still, she had the background. So he married her. Zena looked at him, and wondered

why people thought Robert Taylor was good.

It might be instructive to take a look at Cuthbert Kendal. The man was astute rather than intelligent, cunning rather than constructive. He was rather above medium height, but looked smaller since his shoulder span was considerable. Mostly his clothes were so well cut that the depth of chest was not noticeable. His hands were small, and the tapering fingers seemed somewhat feminine. Cuthbert thought plenty about his hands. May be the eyes were his best feature. They were slumberously brown, seemed like rich velvet. He knew how to use them. His lips were too full, but the white teeth forgave them. The chin was well defined, and the nose could pass muster. His chestnut hair was massed in tight curls. A woman would have liked it. Cuthbert liked it himself.

The ace Kendal carried up his sleeve was his speaking voice. It was full and melodious, a rich baritone. And when he decided to turn on the emotion he could make crooners sound like knives scratching on plates. Oddly enough, there were times when he talked to people who hadn't seen things his way. Then he could make his voice sound like knives scratching on plates!

But he only used that tone on special occasions.

Cuthbert made many calls on business firms and on manufacturers. After a good many of his calls things started happening on the premises. Safes were bust wide open, warehouses were ransacked. Kendal had turned himself into a super "finger-man." He had developed the art of "casing" a job, laying his finger on the right man to pull the stroke, and then sitting back with an alibi so good that truth itself would squirm. Often he was with the men being robbed at the moment when his "boys" were working. Or he was playing whist by his fireside with a couple of respectable neighbours, and the placid Zena. It was a pleasant set-up.

The men who worked on the jobs could trust Cuthbert. His information was certain and sure. They could rely on it. That made their work easy. It also consoled them to know that Kendal would never talk—except as a manufacturers' agent, or as a loving husband. He wanted no mean cut from any stroke pulled. Still, hell, wasn't it worth the money?

It looked a certainty that Cuthbert's scheme of things would never be shaken. The man was too clever to be caught. He thought that himself. When he crashed his head into the first real snag Cuthbert Kendal slid out of trouble in a manner typical of the man. He had decided that Zena was a grand background, but a damned depressing wife. He started to look around, feeling his way as cautiously as ever. There was a girl in Bayswater. Her name was Alicia Armstrong. She looked good to Cuthbert. In fact, she looked good to every man who passed her. She was just born to make people take a second look. Cuthbert took several peeks at her. Then he collected her. Every time he looked at Alicia he felt more and more proud of himself. The girl liked Cuthbert's money. And he wasn't too bad.

Alicia began to ask questions. Kendal frowned. That wasn't in any part of his programme. Then she started learning things. For instance, she soon knew all about Zena. Cuthbert decided that Alicia was a swell kid, but he could smell danger long before he crashed into it. He talked to Alicia like a fond father, handed her a roll of money, and said he'd had a happy time with her, but he's found she wasn't quite his type of girl. Kendal patted her hand, and faded out. At least, he thought he had faded out. Alicia spent his money with some speed. Then she called at his office. Cuthbert discovered to his amazement that he didn't know the first thing about the fair Alicia. She talked sympathetically about Zena, told him a few times that she'd be the last person to hurt poor Zena's feelings, and then suggested that for a reasonable cash consideration she would not even dream of spilling the beans to poor Zena about her liaison with Cuthbert. He had "worked the black" on so many people himself that quite a few seconds passed before he realised that he was being neatly blackmailed. Cuthbert was most indignant. He said he would have

to think things over, said that she would have an

answer within a week.

Alicia touched him for enough in the way of expenses to last a week, and left the office. Two nights later she danced in the West End. As she stepped from the taxi outside her Bayswater flat a saloon car shot past her. The police surgeon informed the detectives that the four bullets he found in the corpse that had been Alicia were fired from a sub-machine gun. The police worked hard. No person had seen the car, although the shots had been heard. It did not assist them to discover that her male friends numbered hundreds. Cuthbert Kendal, of course, was among them. He was peeved to discover that he had left such a plain trail. The Yard men talked to him for sometime. Cuthbert boxed even more cleverly than usual. The conclusion was a clinch. He finished in the clear.

Yet that episode left one most unpleasant taste in Cuthbert's mouth. A detective, purely by accident, informed Kendal that Mick Cardby, private detective, member of the firm of Cardby and Son, was taking an interest in the killing. He had been engaged by one of Alicia's wealthy admirers. Cuthbert could not have gained his knowledge of crime without hearing plenty about Mick Cardby. And the more he had heard about Cardby the more certain he became that he wanted no part of him. But as time passed he breathed more freely. Cardby did not put in an appearance, and the police seemed to have reached a dead end. Cuthbert returned to Zena, and his quiet fireside. He reckoned that he had learnt a lesson. Beautiful women were a delight, but they were dynamite to anyone in his line of business. It was a pity, he thought, as he took a glance at Zena and suppressed a slight groan.

For months afterwards he stuck to strict businessnothing, of course, but criminal business. After all, that was his profession. The world looked good again. The money was rolling in with a satisfying flow, and the air was clear of suspicion. Just when all seemed

set fair, Cuthbert walked into his second snag.

Many times he had visited a wholesale furrier in Hoxton, Kendal was telling the man that with his contacts through the Provinces he could handle "pussies" so fast that soon he could sell the entire stock of furs. And Cuthbert was a convincing talker. The merchant was no easy person to convince. So Kendal had to visit him many times. And many times he went through the warehouse with the man, looking at the stock of furs-and at other things such as windows, locks, fire escapes, exits and entrances.

One Monday morning they opened the warehouse only to find that during the week-end there had been "callers." Only a quarter of the stock had gone. But that quarter was the cream of the collection, worth easily ten times as much as all the furs left behind. Cuthbert Kendal waited until the story of the robbery had hit the front pages of the evening papers, and then he telephoned the merchant to express his regrets.

"I only hope and trust," he announced, "that the police discover the men who did this. Trade isn't safe

with people like that about London."

"Damn the police!" shouted the distraught furrier. "I'm not trusting them to find out what happened to my stuff. I've sent for Mick Cardby."
"Oh, I see," remarked Cuthbert. His tone had

changed a little. "Well, I've heard that he is very

good. Perhaps he may be able to help you."

He replaced the receiver, placed his finger tips together, tilted back his chair, and stared at the ceiling for an appreciable time. Then he struggled into his coat, informed his staff of two that he would be back later in the day, and drove into Shadwell. He threaded his way through the mean streets, and finally left his car at the corner of an alley. He proceeded on foot for another hundred yards, and turned quickly into a squalid building. At the head of the stairs he rapped on a door. It was opened by a thickly set man with black sleeky hair and a white face.

"Hallo, sir," said the man. "Is there something I

can do for you, eh?"

"There is," said Cuthbert. "Tonight I will be at my place at Islington at nine o'clock. I want Ernie Pace. Beat around until you find him, and tell him to be at Islington at nine without fail. And I don't

want you or him to scream to the housetops that it's

a date. Here's a fiver."

The man flicked a finger to his forehead deferentially. Cuthbert vanished. Within the hour he was seated in his office once again. He looked more assured, and even whistled in a cracked manner. Suddenly his composure was shaken for an instant. A girl appeared, announced to him:

"Mr. Kendal, a Mr. Mick Cardby has arrived, and he says that he has an appointment with you. Shall I

show him in immediately?"

Cuthbert pulled a cigarette from a gold case, and nodded his head.

#### CHAPTER TWO

#### A CURIOUS CUSTOMER

MICK CARDBY walked into the office as though springs were fastened under his heels. Cuthbert had wanted for a long time to examine Cardby at close quartersbut not under these circumstances. What he saw did nothing to reassure him. Cardby had disconcertingly penetrating eyes, and an air of no mean determination. Furthermore, Cuthbert decided that the detective looked highly intelligent, and that reflection brought no comfort to Kendal. Mick sat on the edge of the desk, smiled pleasantly. Cuthbert knew how to handle men. A person like Cardby could only be treated in one way. Attack was the best form of defence. So he snapped:

"You told my secretary that you had an appointment with me. I have no recollection of making any

appointment with you, Mr. Cardby. Explain!"

"I don't use that phrase in the ordinary way. With me it is merely a figure of speech. Really, what I should have told the young lady is that I had decided to have an appointment with you. That would have been quite accurate. I suppose you know just why I wished to make this call?"

"I do not, and I have no room for people who make

appointments for other folk. I don't think I have the time or inclination to talk to you."

"We'll let that slide," said Cardby easily. He seemed very composed. "I have a client named Striberg. He is in the fur business at Hoxton. You know him well. You wanted to act as agent for him in the Provinces. H's lost a helluva lot of his stock. He wants me to recover it for him. Also, he wishes me to smack into gaol the man who pulled the stroke. Follow?"

Mick Cardby could be more than disconcerting. Although he smiled as he talked there was an unmistakable menace underlying his words. Cuthbert had been "through the ropes" too often to become flurried. He had for years prided himself on the fact that he could take it. His eyes were steadily still as he watched Cardby. The cigarette in his hand did not for an instant quiver. He waited for a few seconds before he remarked:

"It is only natural that Mr. Striberg should desire some assistance." He stared directly into the detective's eyes and asked easily: "Are you in the fur trade, Mr. Cardby? I get around a lot among farriers, and I have not met you. I suppose you must have some connection with the trade?"

Cardby decided that Kendal had no mean nerve. He

replied speedily:

"I'm in another line of business altogether. I collect criminals, and recover stolen goods. I feel sure you must have heard my name before."

"It had a somewhat familiar ring," said Cuthbert insolently, "but I am not able to place you. Are you a policeman or something of that sort?"

"Something of that sort-yes. What can you tell

me about this job?"

Kendal inhaled some smoke. It looked as though the battle was about to start. Cardby did not intend to waste time fencing for position. Cuthbert picked up the evening paper from his desk, folded it so that the top half of the front page showed, and pushed it over to Cardby as he said:

"Here is the source of all my information. I hope

you find it useful."

"Thanks a million. Are you interested in racing,

Mr. Kendal?" Cuthbert frowned. What was this move? He dare not assume that Cardby was fooling. Still, he had to make some sort of a reply.

"I have a bet on Derby day. Otherwise, I think it

is a fool's game." "Then why did you buy this early edition of the evening paper? Ninety-nine times out of a hundred there is nothing in the edition apart from racing news. Don't tell me that you spent the penny on a hunch!"

Cuthbert breathed more freely. Cardby had made a clever move, but this time the answer was easy. Kendal

smiled tolerantly as he remarked:

"There are such things as posters, or placards. saw one an hour or two ago. It said: 'Big London Fur Robbery.' I have an interest in the trade. bought a paper. I can't see anything unusual in such an act."

"You telephoned Mr. Striberg. Did you tell him that with your intensive knowledge of the trade you

might be able to render some assistance ?"

"I did not. He told me that you were employed, so why should I interfere? You are being paid for the job, not me. I wish you the best of luck. It is a great misfortune for poor Mr. Striberg."

"That sounds odd. A moment ago you didn't know me. But we'll let it pass. It may end by being a much greater misfortune for other people. Your knowledge of the trade is considerable. If you owned that cargo of stolen furs, where would you plant them ! Which market would you choose?"

"I don't know the people who buy stolen furs. I deal only in the legitimate trade. There may be outlets.

I know nothing about them." "That's too bad. I was hoping that you might assist me. At one time or another you gave some pretty handsome furs to Alicia Armstrong, eh?"

Cuthbert rose stiffly to his feet, and pointed to the

door.

"I don't like to be reminded of that poor girl," ne

announced. "Get out of here before I lose my temper. You are a most impudent man, Cardby."

"I've been called much worse than that on many occasions, and I still live. Would you mind telling me what market you had in mind when you told Mr. Striberg that you could sell his furs? The news might help me."

"I intended to find a market as I travelled around.

Now, get out, please!"

"Shortly. You don't seem to have a lot of business on hand, Mr. Kendal. Am I right in thinking that you have spent sometime in the States? I seem to detect an American accent superimposed on your Midland accent."

"I am answering no turther questions. You are wasting your time here if you are supposed to be investigating the Striberg case. Why don't you make some attempt to earn your money? Striberg isn't paying for nothing."

"That's true," remarked Cardby. "He is paying me to get results, and I mean to get them. One day I'll

call back here for another little chat."

"I hope not. I don't like men of your type. I prefer gentlemen."

"How would you know one when you met him? You

puzzle me. See you later."

Mick Cardby picked up his hat and strode out of the office. Cuthbert moved out later and brought himself a brandy. He was cursing silently. He had never intended to start such a party as this. Now he was damning Striberg and his furs. While he sipped his drink Cardby was seated in the firm's Henrietta

Street offices talking to his father.

"That man Kendal," he said, "has got brains. I'm sure he is the person I want, but it won't be easy to pin anything on him. I couldn't imagine a bloke of that type making any move without using plenty of forethought. I expect we'll find that he has covered every move he made. But I'd give plenty to put the skids under him. After all, Dad, I haven't forgiven him yet for beating me to it on the Alicia Armstrong

murder. He killed that girl for a certainty, but it was a damned clever job. It beat me."

"Don't be too sure about the set-up, Mick," said his father. The older man had spent many years at the Yard before he retired into private practice. He had learnt many times that confidence does not bring much grist to a detective. "I still don't know why you are

certain that Kendal did this fur job."

"I made a hundred and one inquiries about him when I was working on the Armstrong case. I managed to collect some peculiar rumours, but no definite facts. All the same, the rumours came from so many sources that they began to add up. Some of the boys even whispered that Kendal had never been a manufacturers' agent. They said his business was a blind. As soon as I saw Striberg's place I knew that the job had been pulled, or arranged, by some person who knew the inside of the warehouse like the back of his hand. Naturally, I thought at once that it was an inside job. He only had a staff of five in that warehouse. I questioned all of them. I am chsolutely convinced that they are in the clear.

"Once I had decided that the staff was out of the party I questioned Striberg about his callers. It was then that the name of Cuthbert Kendal cropped up. Immediately I pinned my ears back. The news sounded a bit more than promising. I began to form a picture in my mind, and then I made a call on Kendal. I had nothing on him, it is true, but I wanted to give him a slight shaking. You know better than I do that men sometimes act recklessly if you can throw a scare into them. Still, I left his place knowing that I was unlucky. You wouldn't scare that man unless you set Now I'll have to get back to the first fire to him. base, and start work. What bright ideas has the brains

of the firm got ?"

"Here's one that might help you. The furs were good. The men on the job only picked the best. That means to me that among them was a person with an expert knowledge. Work along that line. another angle I'd like you to bear in your mind. Really first-class furs are usually known in the trade. You can sell a coat for a hundred pounds, and get away with it. These coats are like the flowers in spring. But start trying to plant coats worth a thousand pounds apiece, and you've got a difficult job. In the fur trade you might as well write the name and address on any sort of an outstanding coat. Now that sounds to me, Mick, as though the market for those furs is not in this country at all. Wouldn't you agree?"

"It seems likely. You think that they made a mistake by taking coats which were too good, that they'd

have done better with moderate stuff?"

"That's just what I don't mean. I said they must have had an expert with them to choose the stuff to take away. Well, he would know that it was almost impossible to dispose of such coats through any normal channels in the trade in this country. It doesn't seem feasible that the coats would be stolen on the outside chance that they would be sold. But it does seem a certainly to me that the market for the coats had been fixed before they were stolen. And I fancy that market is abroad. If you will get around among the real experts in the trade they could give you a guiding line. That is exactly what I would advise you to do."

"I'll make a start very soon, Dad. Thanks for the tip. By the way, the way in which the warehouse was bust open taught me nothing. The job could have been done by at least a hundred men I know well. The side door was forced, a truck was drawn up in the alley at the side of the place, the furs were loaded, and the truck vanished. That is all one can say. It means that the robbery itself gives me no lead whatever. You have known scores and scores of robberies committed in precisely the same way. Now I am left with your words of acvice, and the hunch that Kendal is the man who arranged the stroke. It doesn't get you very far, does it, Dad ?"

"Inspected Wells is handling the job for the police.

What does he say?"

"He still believes that it was an inside job, and he was still busy hammering the staff when I left him. I didn't even bother to say that I was sure he was backing the wrong horse. I don't think he'll get far."

"Maybe not. I never felt inclined to rate him highly. Striberg himself has spent forty years in the trade, so surely he should have a few ideas worth hearing. Couldn't he give you any sort of a lead at all, Mick?"

"Later on he may be able to help, but for the time being the old boy is so dazed that he doesn't quite

know what he is talking about."

"I suppose you asked him what value he placed

on the stolen stuff?"

"He said twenty-two thousand pounds. He is fully covered by insurance. His main grief seemed to be that his collection of minks could not be replaced for years. The old man was very, very proud of his stock."

"But he wouldn't want to keep it so that he could sit back and admire it. One point of some interest, son: Did he tell you why he did not employ Kendal as an agent if Kendal was certain that he could sell the stuff?"

"He did, and the answer is a bit odd. He said he had made a number of inquiries in the trade, and Cuthbert Kendal was not known enough to sell stuff of such quality. Kendal had disposed of furs from time to time, but all the pussies he sold were of moderate quality. He had never touched the cream of the market, and Striberg was certain it would be a flop."

"Since Kendal made several calls upon him, Striberg had every chance to tell him that any question of a

deal was off. So why didn't he?"

"The old man has a few other lines-inferior fursand he believed that Kendal could have disposed of those for him. That, he said, was the reason why he did not show the man the door. It sounded sensible to me."

. "And me. But you took a guess that Kendal's business was a dummy. Yet you tell me now that he

certainly had sold an amount of stuff."

"Lordy, Dad, he wouldn't have the brazen nerve to sell nothing! There had to be a few business deals as the background to the bluff."

Mick walked into the outer office, paused to speak to Constance Wheeler, the firm's secretary. She had

endured his banter for several years, but the strain had

done nothing to impair the girl's good looks.

"Angelic," he said, "the next time your boy friend wants to buy you a mink coat, just send him along to me. I'm becoming a regular expert, lady."

"Mr. Cardby," she retorted, "you couldn't tell a mink

coat from a carpet."

"So you reject my kindly offer? Sister, my heart bleeds for your boy!"

"Your heart has bled for so many women that I'm surprised you haven't passed out with a hæmorrhage.

You must be a full-blooded young man?"

Cardby bowed and strode out of the building. He did not feel that he was getting anywhere. Perhaps, he thought, there was one considerable snag. He had been advised many times by his father to concentrate upon any job to the exclusion of other matters. Yet, oddly enough, each time he thought of Striberg and his lost furs he commenced to throw back his mind to the killing of Alicia Armstrong. It annoyed him.

It was shortly after eight o'clock that night when Cuthbert Kendal rose from the comfort of his easy

chair, stretched his arms, yawned, said:

"Sorry, Zena, that I've got to get out. There's a man leaving for Bristol tonight, and I must do some business with him before he pulls out. I don't expect that I'll be away for very long. Make yourself comfortable, dear."

Zena beamed upon him. Her Cuthbert was always so charmingly considerate.

Kendal took the Underground, and headed for North London. It was not long before he paced leisurely along Liverpool Road, Islington. He was in no hurry, and when he dived into the network of streets lying to the west of Liverpool Road his progress became even slower. Eventually he stopped outside a shoddy house in a narrow and unpleasant back street. He pushed back the front door. Immediately a door at the end of the passage opened. A frowsy woman of about sixty met him with a wide smile as she said:

"Good-evening, Mr. Wheeler. I wondered when I

was going to see you again. You are a one for travel-ling about, aren't you, Mr. Wheeler?"

"I get around, Mrs. Cross. Still, even if I don't come here often you get paid for my room regularly, so you've got nothing to worry about, eh?"
"I'm not worried, sir. My gentlemen do mostly just

as they like."

Her "gentlemen" consisted of a bookmaker's runner,
a pickpocket, a tick-tack specialist from the dog tracks, a third-rate pugilist, an old lag who declared that he was looking for a job—and "Mr. Wheeler."

Cuthbert hurried up the narrow and creaking staircase. If Mrs. Cross was not particular, nor were her "gentlemen." The house was filthy. He opened the door of the back bedroom, struck a match and lit the gas. Cuthbert winced. He always did when he saw that room. Kendal was fond of comfort. As he stood in the ten feet by ten bedroom he stared at the cracked mirror placed on the badly stained wall, the oak wardrobe with the handle missing from the door, the small square of faded carpet, and the narrow iron bedstead. The picture was completed by the dressing-table—a sugar box covered with cheap cretonne holding a huge cracked bowl, and a jug minus the handle. He sat on the edge of the bed, and lit a smoke.

Time started to drag badly. Cuthbert almost felt depressed. The house was very quiet. The other tenants did most of their "work" at night. At last he heard the stairs creak. He glanced at his watch. It was shortly after nine o'clock. A rap sounded at the door. Cuthbert took two strides across the floor, and pulled back the door. A man shuffled into the room without speaking. Kendal said nothing as he closed

The visitor stood with his hand clutching the iron the door. bed rail. He was a curious type. There wasn't very much of him. He was about pint pot size. Maybe he measured an inch or two over five feet, and his weight would be about eight stone. Wisps of lanky, straw-coloured hair hung down over the low forehead. Beneath the brow were the eyes of a pig-intensely blue, set deeply, and inclined to jerk quickly. His shoulders were narrow, and the chest sank inwards. His free hand moved constantly, jerking a cap from side to side. He parted his lips to show about three discoloured teeth.

"'Evening, Boss," he said. His voice was high-pitch-

ed. "Told you want me."

"That's right, Ernie. Sit down on the bed, and make

yourself at home."

Ernie Pace sat down. Cuthbert noticed that the man's body was twitching, and he smiled as he watched it. He thought it was a promising sign.

it. He thought it was a promising sign.
"I've brought you here," said Cuthbert, "because I've got a job for you to do. I don't think that a man

with your brain will find it very nasty."

"You know, Boss," remarked Ernie, "that mostly I'm always ready to give you a helping hand. It wouldn't be the first time I've worked for you."

"Oh, I value your services very considerably, Ernie. This is a special job, and that's why I wanted to give

it to a really reliable man."

Ernie tried to throw out what bit of chest he had. It was not a great success. He realised that, so he nodded his head emphatically as well.

"There's a man about town named Mick Cardby," said Cuthbert, casually. "I want him rubbed out. And I think you're the very man for the job, Ernie."

Ernie Pace sprang to his feet, and a trembling hand

clutched his chin.

"Wait a minute, wait a minute!" he said hoarsely.
"You mean the split?"

"That's the very man. He's a nuisance, and I want

him moved out of it."

"Blimey, mister," remarked Ernie, "then you'll have to find another bloke to do the job for you. Murder Mick Cardby? Not for me, Boss! Try again!"

Ernie Pace started to move towards the bedroom door. He was trembling violently, and his hands were jerking as though worked on strings. Kendal gripped the man's thin shoulders, and pushed him back on the bed. Ernie had his lips parted like a fish on the bank. His eyes seemed wider.

"Don't start trying to take it on the lam," said

Cuthbert. He was no longer smiling. Ernie stared at

the vicious face. He was frightened.

"I wasn't running out, Boss," he said, "but there isn't a bloke in all the Smoke who would take on the killing of Mick Cardby. You might just as well commit suicide. I've heard plenty about him. Find somebody

else, Boss."
"There is one man in the Smoke who would and could rub our Cardby, and that man is you, Ernie," said Cuthbert gently. "I sent for you because I knew you were the only boy among my bunch who would do

it for me."

"Mister, you've made a big mistake this time. You've picked the wrong man. I'll chance my arm on plenty

of things. I have done. But not this one."

"You make things very difficult for me," commented Cuthbert, sighing. "I had no idea that you'd be too scared to make a move. I reckon that's because it is a long time since you had your last 'shot,' and you've got the jitters. 'Snow' takes people that way, Ernie, and you've sniffed the stuff for so long now that you don't know what you are, or who you are, without it. I've got a little load of heroin in my pocket for you, Ernie."

"I don't want it!" shouted the man, jumping to his feet again. Cuthbert pushed him. He sprawled on the

bed. Kendal moved over, sat beside Ernie.

"It seems," he said, "that I've got to talk to you like a father. When I sent for you I didn't want to hand out the line you're going to hear now. I hoped that you'd act sensibly, and take a jump at the job. Won't you?"

"I will not, Boss," whimpered Ernie Pace. "It isn't

"That's for me to decide. You know what happens to men who try walking out on me, don't you? Well, something worse than that will happen to you."

Ernie Pace groaned. He had heard Cuthbert Kendal

using that tone before. "I'm going to lay a few cards on the table," said Kendal slowly, "and want you to prop your ears back, and use whatever brain you have got. It is nearly four

months ago now since an old lady living in the Leslie Hotel, Hampstead, had her jewellery stolen. The fact that she had the gems lifted didn't matter a lot. The trouble was that the man who lifted them murdered the old lady. And that makes a very, very different story."

Ernie Pace sat bolt upright, and stared at Cuthbert

incredulously.

"The splits have tried like hell," continued Kendal, "to lay their mitts on the man who murdered that old girl. So far they haven't had any luck. I may be right in thinking that the man who bashed her head in has had plenty of luck. Candidly, I think he was so coked up with 'snow' that he didn't know what he was doing. That's only an idea of mine, Ernie."

Pace remained silent. He was so scared that he

found speech difficult.

"So where do we arrive?" asked Kendal. He spoke almost in the tones of a schoolmaster handling a difficult scholar. He even shook his head rather reproachfully. "The laws in this country, Ernie, are very kind. They won't hang you more than once whatever you have done. P'r'aps they can't see much point swinging corpses. So once you have pulled a killing it doesn't matter a hoot if you do another ten. Once you are caught the net result is the same. I think you'll have sense enough to follow my line of thought in a moment. You murdered that old girl at Hampstead. If you are caught you take the long drop. So what have you got to lose by doing in any other person? Try to work it out for yourself for a minute."

Ernie licked his lips, and pressed a dirty thumb against his nose. "Boss," he said, "I'm in the clear on that Hampstead job. You know that."

Kendal bent forward and prodded the man's chest with his index finger. "Ernie," he murmured, "you are only in the clear on that killing for as long as I want you to be in the clear. Now, am I making myself plain ?"

"Good God! You don't mean that you'd put in a

squeal on me, do you, Boss ?"

"That's exactly what I've got in my mind. What

about this other job?"

Ernie Pace rose and walked to and fro across the small room. Cuthbert watched him closely. He thought he had got the man on the mental run.
"Blast you!" said Pace. "You've got me where you

want me. I'll do it."

"I had a thought in my head that you could be sensible. Here's your packet of poison. Now sit down while I work things out for you. This is the way Mick Cardby travels to the cemetery. Listen carefully."

## CHAPTER THREE

### INTERVIEW WITH DEATH

MICK CARDBY twisted restlessly in his bed. He was certain that he had not set the alarm clock. Suddenly, he realised that the peal of bells in his ears came from the telephone. He switched on the bed-light. Almost instinctively he glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes past midnight. Cardby had been in bed for exactly half an hour. He raised the receiver, and heard a feminine voice calling somewhat hysterically over the

"Is that you, Mick? This is Joanna Peters. I hate ringing you at this time, but I'm in most awful trouble,

and I'd like you to give me a moment."

"Say your piece, and I'll do anything I can to give a helping hand."

"I can't talk over the phone, Mick. I know you're settled down in bed, but please come round to my place and see me. I can't very well explain now, but I wouldn't be ringing if it wasn't really important."

"Can't the sob story wait until the morning without

"No, really it couldn't. I'm in a desperate mess, and going cold?" I know what you are, and I'm I don't know what to do. sure you could fix it in a minute."

"Doesn't sound to me as though the Empire is at stake if I can fix the set-up in a minute. All right,

Joanna, I'll be with you in twenty minutes."

Mick Cardby tumbled out of bed. Within five minutes he was dressed, and in another couple of minutes he was ready to leave the room. It was at that moment when his father pushed back the door, rubbed his eyes, said:

"And where's the wandering boy drifting off to now?

Can't you sleep ?"

"I've had a call from a girl friend. She thinks she's in the mire. I've been called in as the guardian angel.

I don't think I'll be away for long."

"Take it easy, lad. You've got a stack of girl friends. Mostly what they have on their minds can wait until the next morning. And mostly the next morning you find that the thought upsetting them wasn't important enough to be lodged on anybody's mind. Why not get back into bed, and think?"

"This time, Dad, things are different. I'll make the

call, and get back."

"Hell's bells! What a life you lead! You'll never reach a pension, son."

"Maybe not. I'm not sure that I'd like peace and security. Wander back to the soft sheets, Dad, and I'll be seeing you at breakfast time."

"Sure there's nothing I can do to stop you wandering

around at night?"

"Yes, knock me unconscious! I'm easy, Dad. The night air suits me well."

"Lad, one day you'll act the Sir Galahad role once too

often. I know."

"Your advice, Dad, is ace high. I'm grateful.

beat off to bed. S'long."

Mick walked along the mews at the back of their flat. He kept his car in one of the garages at the rear. It was only after he had opened the garage door that he changed his mind, locked it again, and headed towards the street. He stood on the pavement for two or three minutes before a cruising taxi passed him, and he flagged it.

"I'd like the junction of Warwick Road and West

Cromwell Road, Earl's Court," he said. "There's no hurry, and I only want the corner of the road."

Ten minutes later the taxi pulled to a stop. Mick sauntered slowly along West Cromwell Road until he crossed over to cut into Templeton Place. It was then that his actions became somewhat odd. For quite a time he stood crouched against a wall, staring at the houses. Then he crossed the road, waited for a brief space, and then swung himself over the side door of a house. He had made no sound when opening the gate, walking along the path.

He looked through the gloom at the small, walled garden, and then moved towards the south wall. He slid over that, and arrived in another garden. Three times he repeated that movement. Each action was slow, deliberate, and silent. He trod his way across a garden, heading eastwards until he found the wall at the foot of the garden. He clambered over that, dropped on the other side, and stood with his feet planted on the soft soil while he stared around. Sometime passed before he was satisfied. Then he swung to the left, scaled another wall, and arrived close to the

Mick was certainly in no hurry. He moved forward back of a house. inch by inch until he arrived against the wall of the house. A couple of yards away from him he could see the faint glimmer of glass on the French windows. He was glad that his shoes were caked with soil. The sound of his tread was deadened. He moved again, and stretched out his left hand. The windows were three or four inches ajar. Cardby slid his right hand into his pocket, took a firmer grip on the window, and then heaved with all the strength he could throw into one arm and shoulder. He heard the fastener snap, and the window was flung back. Mick did a headlong dive through the open space.

Instantly a gun cracked; and a bullet crashed through a window pane a foot away from Cardby's head. Mick saw the slight streak of orange light, and pumped a shot towards it. He heard a shriek of pain, and pulled the trigger again. He knew without any doubt that he had hit flesh. He heard no sound of impact. Instead there came another cry of pain. He flung himself on the floor. A man cursed shrilly, and a bullet struck the wall a yard above his body. This time Cardby had a chance to take more deliberate aim. He did. There was another sob of pain, and he heard a scrunching noise.

The detective guessed that somebody was folding up on their knees. He rolled over, and looked into the corner again. His eyes were becoming more accustomed to the dark. He could see the dark outline of a heap close to the wall. Mick moved once again. His gun was pointed towards the dark patch on the floor. He made no other move, lay still, and waited. Nothing happened, except an occasional stifled sob. Cardby slid backwards towards the far corner of the room. Slowly, he rose to his feet, groped with his left hand until he found the light switch. Then he pressed down.

When the light flooded the room, Cardby crouched, stood with his gun at the ready. The man lying in the other corner was squirming and moaning. A gun lay on the carpet by the man's outstretched hand. Cardby twisted round, and turned the key in the lock of the door. Then he paced over to the sprawling figure, pushed the man in the ribs with his foot, and said:

"Don't whine like a stuck pig. You're not dead yet. But you damned soon will be if you don't play ball with

me. Let's be taking a look at you."

He pushed the man so that he lay on his back.

Cardby glanced at the wizened face, the straw-coloured hair, the slender figure. He whistled. He had no idea who the man could be. And professional killers are rare birds!

Mick hesitated no longer. He knew that in the front room of that ground floor flat was a telephone. Mostly, he wanted his father to arrive on the scene. For a second he glanced at the man again. Cardby could see two hits plainly. Blood was oozing from his left shoulder, and from the right hip. Cardby did not wait any further, scurried out of the room and into the front room. He started to dial his own number. Mick was still waiting for the call when his best laid schemes went badly awry.

He heard the loud report of a shot. There could be no doubt about the source of the sound—it came from the room he had just left. Mick let the receiver drop from his hand, and raced into the rear room. For one second he stared at the man on the floor. Then he swore luridly.

The man was dead. The side of his head was blown

Yet the revolver still rested near the outstretched hand. Cardby made a move towards the open windows, and abruptly changed his mind. Instead of advancing he retreated, and turned off the light in the room. Standing against the open window with the light behind him he would have been a sitting bird as a target. He had been standing on tough spots for so long that another one only meant an addition to the collection. So Cardby sat down on a chair, faced the corpse, and the windows, and waited for a while. Nothing happened -except that people were tramping down the staircase.

Mick Cardby had never been very slow on the uptake. He had spent five minutes of his time reaching the room through the gardens. On his return journey the trip lasted less than a minute. He turned back on his course and arrived in Earl's Court Road. almost reached Kensington Road before a stray cab collected him. The driver noticed nothing unusual The passenger was quite at ease, seemed almost sorry to abandon his late night stroll. about his fare. He gave an address a hundred yards away from his own home, and was still ambling along in a casual manner when he reached it. But once inside the house he headed for his father's bedroom, touched the older man on the shoulder, and beckoned towards the door.

Cardby, senior, was too used to his son's exploits to regard them with any astonishment. He merely sat

down in the lounge and inquired:

"You wouldn't expect me to believe you if you say you've been jilted and it has shattered you, would you?

Wipe some of the dirt from your coat, Mick."

The son looked at his suit and grinned. He had brought back with him several specimens of dirt from the garden walls. Mick walked into the kitchen, placed the kettle on the gas ring. He felt that a little coffee would not course down the gullet unkindly. And while the water boiled he recited the events of the night to his father. The older man stretched out once for his pipe. Apart from that action he was still and silent.

"Now you've got the whole chronicle of events," said Mick. "I've left a stiff behind me, and who the man

may be the Lord alone knows. I don't."
"You're holding out on me, Mick. I know that you take anything like this in your stride, but it wasn't luck that saved you from being killed. When a lady friend rings a man he doesn't usually climb over garden walls to make the call-unless he is scared stiff about an angry husband. Surely it would have been more normal for you to push the front door bell."

"I just had a hunch that I'd better enter the place

the way I did."

"Sez you! If that was a hunch, then the fact that you're sitting in this room is just a blind guess on my

part. Don't stall with me, son."

"You're pretty shrewd, Dad. I'll lay the cards face upwards on the table. When I left this place I was practically convinced that the girl, Joanna Peters, had not made that telephone call. Had I been sure that Joanna had made the call I would never have gone round! I'd have told her that she could say her piece over the wire, or she could wait until the morning. It was only the certainty that the call was screwy that made me go round."

"Mick, have you ever heard of the person who asked for trouble? You mean that when you heard the voice

you were sure it was not the girl talking?"

"I don't mean that at all, Dad. The imitation of the voice was so good that I could easily have believed it. I discovered that the call was a phoney in a very simple manner. Let me bore you for a moment. Once I took Joanna Peters to the cinema. I hate 'em in any case. She knew that I was almost asleep all the way through the show. When we came out of the place we had an argument. She tried to convince me that I was rather superior about cinemas. I informed her that the screen had only produced one real star

—and that was Mickey Mouse. From that moment until now she has called me Mickey instead of Mick. The person on the line tonight called me nothing but Mick. Funny, isn't it, what odd happenings in this life can save you from the grave? Now you know all the answers. What's the verdict?"

"First verdict, son, is that you'll born the bottom out of that kettle if you don't start making that coffee.

So do that job just for a start."

Mick made the coffee, and both men took a cup. The

father spoke first:

"You know your way about, Mick, but just what do you know about the girl Joanna Peters? I'm not being

inquisitive. Still, I'd like the answer."

"I don't blame you, Dad, for asking that question. In your place I'd have fired the same shot. But this time you can wipe the girl off the sheet. I have known her for rather more than a year, and you can take it from me that she's got no connection with crime what-Her only knowledge of it comes from the films. Joanna is one of the crack illustrators for the ladies' magazines. There are moments when I've thought she was a trifle dumb, but I've never known an instant when I haven't regarded her as dead straight. We can start by wiping her off the slate entirely."

"All right, we will. I reckon I can trust your judgment, son. Now, let's try another tack. This isn't the first time that an attempt has been made to rub you out. Mostly, though, the cause has been sticking out like a sore thumb. People wouldn't try to murder you unless they had their finger in a pie, and had come to the conclusion that you were dangerous. Agree?"

"They wouldn't be likely to rub me out because they

"And nobody has made an attempt unless you've didn't like my eyes." been in the middle of a case, have they? They haven't

made a murder attempt as an afterthought?" "That's true enough, Dad. I can see what you'd got on your mind. I'm not going to disagree with you at all. I don't think you need a penetrating brain to work out this lot. I had almost a clear bill of business until I started in on the Striberg job. That's the only case I'm working on at the moment. Therefore, according to your reckoning, this attempted rub-out tonight must be tied up with my investigation of that case. that it?"

"Well, I can't see it any other way. Where do you

get from there ?"

"I get to Cuthbert Kendal," announced Mick, grimly.

"If he is at the back of the Striberg job. Don't be

too certain, Mick."

"He may have nothing to do with that job. But I only missed by inches pinning that Alicia Armstrong murder on him, and he may be nervous to find that I am on his doorstep again. Maybe he isn't afraid of taking the rap for a fur robbery, but he still has the girl's killing on his mind."

"I wouldn't blame him if he feels that way about it. There's always an outside chance, Mick, that he believes you are using the Striberg case as a blind to continue your investigation into the Alicia Armstrong death."

"Which would explain plenty, wouldn't it? Cuthbert Kendal must be getting an outsize in jittery consciences. All right, Dad, we'll leave it at that. I won't trouble you any more now. I have an idea that little Cuthbert is making one helluva bed for himself. want to see him lying on it."

"Make sure that you don't under-estimate him, son.

The man must be good."

"I'm worried to death! Dive into some beauty sleep, Dad, and we'll decide the next move in the morning. I think I'll be calling on Cuthbert Kendal."

"Don't be in any great hurry to do that. He may

be calling on you, Mick."

As they rose to their feet the telephone bell jangled. Mick shrugged his shoulders as he picked up the

receiver. He listened to the woman saying :

"Is that you, Mickey? This is Joanna speaking. Please come round to my place at Nevern Place right away. It is vitally important, Mickey, or I'd never have bothered you. There's been an awful lot of trouble here."

"I'll be with you, Joanna," said Mick. "'Trouble'

is my middle name."

"Be careful," warned his father, "that the police don't try to pin a murder rap on you. Leave your gun behind, and take mine with you."

"As a retired Yard man," said Mick, "you're a most

unscrupulous bloke!"

#### CHAPTER FOUR

#### AMBLING AROUND

MICK took his car from the garage, and drove to Nevern Place. As soon as Joanna Peters opened the door he knew what sort of party awaited him. In the hall, immediately behind the girl, stood Divisional Detective-Inspector Swale. Cardby nodded his head towards the girl, and flicked a hand towards his brow as a flippant salute to the detective. He said to him:

"You've started keeping late hours, haven't you, Swaley? You'll find that they'll tell on you in time.

Look after your health, Inspector. It's vital."

"Come right inside," said the Inspector. He certainly was not smiling as he led the way into the room at the rear. Cardby looked at the man on the floor in the corner. The photographers had just finished their job. The fingerprint men were packing up their equipment. Joanna Peters was pale, and shivery. Cardby thought undue pallor rather suited the girl, but would have appreciated it more without the tremors. She gripped his arm, said : "I had to send for you, Mickey. Look at this dead man. Isn't it awful?"

"They never do look like things on Christmas cards, Joanna," commented Mick. "I think you'd better tell.

me what has been happening. Go easy."
"I think," interrupted the Inspector, "that you'd better tell me just what has been happening. I've already got the full story from the girl."

"But I haven't," said Mick, "and I'm waiting to hear it. Go ahead, child."

"I was in bed," announced the girl, "when the door-

bell rang. I didn't do anything, and it rang another couple of times. So I went along the passage and called out to ask who it was. The voice wasn't very clear, but the person said, 'This is Mick Cardby. want a word with you.' I opened the door, and after that I don't remember very much. A man dashed into the passage, and before I could do anything he put a thing like a pillow-case over my head, pulled it tightly round my neck, and then picked me up. This thing round my head had a funny, sweet smell, and I started feeling sick and dizzy. They fastened me up. I didn't know until afterwards that they had pushed me into the bottom of the built-in wardrobe in my bedroom. I don't know how long I was there, but I suddenly felt dreadfully sick, and I could hardly breathe. I heard some shots being fired. At least, I know now that they were shots, but then I only wondered what the bangs were. Some of the people from upstairs got into the flat, and saw this man on the floor. They sent for the police, and the police found me lying in the wardrobe. There's really nothing else I can tell you, Mickey."

"I think there's plenty that he can tell me," said Swale. "How do you suppose your name came to be mixed up with this lot, Cardby? And what do you know about this stiff? Why should he mention your

name at all ?"

"Your questions embarrass me, Inspector. Let's settle one thing at a time. You ask why he should mention my name at all. That can only mean that he was the man ringing the doorbell, the man who said he was me. Is that the truth, Joanna? Was he the man who put the bag over your head?"

"I couldn't swear to it, Mickey. I think it was. I think he must have been the man. That's what I told

the Inspector. Who else could it have been?"

"Hold your horses for a moment," said Mick, as Inspector Swale was about to speak. He walked over to the corpse, bent down, and ran his fingers over the arms, shoulders and chest. When he straightened up he stared at the girl, and his lips were twisted in a sarcastic smile. Joanna was a vivid blonde, pretty enough to be a model for one of her own illustrations.

She had a figure modelled almost upon classical lines. Joanna had none of the modern woman's depressing flatness. She had curves in all the places where a woman's curves should be. Cardby lit a smoke, and smiled again.

"You'll shed that smile before I'm through with my questions, Cardby," said Swale. "Let's start, and see

where your story leads us to."

"Before you start, Swaley," remarked Mick casually, "I'd like to ask Miss Peters a very simple question. What do you weigh, Joanna?"

"What a funny question, Mickey! I'm about nine

stone ten pounds now."

Cardby grinned again, and shrugged his shoulders as

he said to Swale:

"Take a look at the stiff. Feel his arms and Take a peek at that sunken chest. And then ask yourself whether he could carry a husky girl like Miss Peters right through the flat from the front door to her bedroom. This ain't no age of miracles, Swaley. I'm saying he couldn't do it."

Inspector Swale looked at the girl, and then stared at the corpse. Some full minute later he nodded his

head grudgingly as he said to Mick:

"I think you've got something there, Cardby, but that only means that a second man came here with him. All right, we'll assume that there were two of them. What have we left? Just that a stranger to Miss Peters has been shot to death in her flat. Can you explain why that should happen?" "Are you asking me to solve this case for you, Swaley?"

"Not exactly, although I fancy you can go a long way towards explaining things. You've heard the girl's story. Now I'm waiting to hear yours."

"I think I can assist you part of the way, Swaley. I can tell you that there is a woman mixed up in the case. That's not a wild theory. Unless a grand female impersonator is involved in the killing there must be a woman in the party. I'll tell you why. received a telephone call from a woman who said she was Joanna Peters. She asked me to come round to this flat. She called me Mick as though she knew me very well. If you want the final coping stone on the building, I'd advise you to start by betting that this man on the floor was waiting here to murder me. Does that help?"

Inspector Swale jerked back his head and eyed Mick Cardby closely. "And after that curious speech," he said, "are you going to tell me that you did not come

to this flat after you received the telephone call?"
Mick was about to shake his head. Suddenly he happened to glance downwards. For the first time he noticed the waxed parquet flooring. His brain worked in top gear. He was thinking of the "dabs" men who had just left the premises, he was recalling that he had rested with his left hand on the floor, and he was wondering whether anything could take a better fingerprint than a waxed floor! He smiled as he said easily:

"I'm not trying to take you up the garden path, Inspector. At moments I know quite an amount about crime myself. This is one of those moments. I did come here. I have never disputed it. If you'll take a look at the window you'll see a hole. Gaze at the wall, and you'll see another one. Both those bullets were fired at me. I fired at the man. You'll find that I hit him in the shoulder and the thigh. I knew that he was very much alive, but that he could not move. I shot out into the front room to telephone my father. While I was in that room some third party blew part of the man's head off. Don't take my word for it. Swaley. You can hand the three bullets over to any ballistician, and he'll tell you that two came from my gun, and the man was killed by a bullet fired from another gun."

"And what happened to you when you made this

sensational discovery?"

"I got to hell out of the place. How was I to know what had happened to the man with the other gun, and why should I wait to find out?"

"Really, really, Cardby! In a moment you'll be telling me that you don't know the man on the floor from Adam!"

"What a guesser you are, Inspector! That's precisely

what I'm saying to you here and now. I don't know him from Adam. When you get the report through from the fingerprint men, you'd be doing me a great favour if you give me any information you've got about him. I'm entitled to have a strong personal interest in this stiff, Swaley. Mind doing that for me ? "

The Inspector appeared dubious. He looked from the corpse to Cardby, and then gazed at the corpse again

as though quite fascinated. He said:

"The story of Jonah seems like Gospel truth compared with your song and dance. So a complete stranger visits a flat where he is not known to murder a man he has never seen? Something new in the way of crime, isn't it, Cardby? Ever heard of anything like it before ?"

"Certainly I have. Don't tell me that in the course of your travels you have never heard of a professional killer! That, I think, was this man's job. Their only interest in the man they set out to murder is the amount of cash they get for pulling the trigger. I've met them quite often."

"You are fond of guessing, aren't you? Tell me why this man was rubbed out, and I'd like to hear from you

the name of the man who did the job."

"I'll take a gamble that he was killed because he had flopped on the killing, and I'm sure that the person who rubbed him out was the man who employed him to do the killing. There's plenty of motive. This man was wounded, but he wasn't dead. The police would have collected him for a certainty. The person employing him dare not take the risk that the man would squeal. That would immediately have made him an accessory before the fact to an attempted murder. That reasoning seems very solid to me."

"There's a lot in it," said Swale grudgingly. "Now you can tell me who is so anxious to see you on the

mortuary slab. You must have an idea."

"Swaley, you know my record fairly well. You know that hundreds of men in this country would give their right hands to see me under the soil. I leave you to take your pick. You can go through the files at my office, and work out your suspects from a hundred cases. I can't help you more."

"Will you let me have the gun you used, Cardby?

I want to check on it."

"It is at home. I'll see that it is sent round to you

in the morning."

"The person must have known you very well if they realised that this lady here would act as a good bait

for you. Does that mean anything?"

"It does, Swaley. It means that I have been in the West End with this lady at least twenty times, and the man must have been one of the thousands who saw me with her. But I don't see how far that carries you. Do you?"

"Are you trying to make this case as awkward as

possible?"

"Not at all. I'm merely indicating that you've got a tough case on the slate. If I can give you a helping hand just let me know, Swaley."

"I'll have to take a full statement from you. That's

most essential."

"Naturally. I'll call at the station around ten in the morning. I take it that there's no further need for me to hang around here now?"

"No, none that I can see. Don't forget that I want

that gun, Cardby."

"I'll bring it with me. How are you feeling, Joanna? Do you think that you'll be all right alone? I'd advise you to leave here right away, and I'll see you fixed up at an hotel. Will that suit you?"

"Thanks a lot, Mickey. I didn't fancy staying here while that corpse is lying on the floor. I'll pack my

bag, and travel along with you."

"That'll be fine. Have a cigarette, Swaley. They're good for frayed nerves. I'll be working on this case from the other end of the story. If I start discovering things I'll bear you in mind. You should get a flying start when the "dabs" men have given you the man's history. I don't think there can be any doubt about whether he is on the file."

"Nor do I. As a matter of fact, each time I glance

at him I'm certain that I've seen him before. I'll give

you a ring when I get the record."

"And then I'll start work scriously," said Mick. "I don't take to it in a very kindly way when people try to tuck me into a wooden overcoat. Somebody is going to pay plenty for this lot before I'm through."

"I'll bet they are," commented the Inspector. He was gazing at the young man's set face, and remembering his past record. He felt almost sorry for the

unknown person who had started the party!

Mick escorted the girl to a quiet West End hotel, told her that he could call in the morning, and then returned home. Within ten minutes he was soundly asleep. Cardby always regarded nerves as something they used for advertisements. They had never troubled him in the least.

It was while they awaited breakfast that he gave his father details of the meeting with Inspector Swale. "You were wise, son," said the father, "to tell him

that you fired the shots. They'd have had your dabs for a certainty from that floor. What do you intend to do now? It looks as though you'll have to alter the programme somewhat, doesn't it? I don't like the look of the picture."

"I'm not bubbling over with enthusiasm. When I've made the call on Swale, and at the girl's hotel, I'm heading along to Mr. Kendal's office."

"Why not stay dumb, and give Kendal the impression that you haven't tied him up with the shooting? would give you more rope, Mick?"

"Kendal would smell a rat immediately. That bloke is dead cute. He'll be expecting me to call this morn-

ing. I'm quite sure about that."

"Have it your own way, Mick. Anything I can do

to help you a little?"

"No, thanks. Just hold the fort at the office in case any other angle turns up. Well, I'll be drifting now. See you on the ice."

Mick made his first call on Inspector Swale.

"I've got some information for you," said the detective immediately Cardby entered the office. "You were quite right. That man had got a record—a good one!

He was Ernest Pace, of Artillery Street, London Bridge. He did three years for burglary, another three for a smash-and-grab, and then took a seven years' stretch for armed robbery. The man was a dope addict, and they have him on the record as a dangerous and violent criminal. He just fits into the picture perfectly, doesn't

"Absolutely. We'll talk about him in a moment. Grab a clerk, and I'll dictate my statement. Here's the gun I used."

It was ten minutes later when Cardby returned to

the matter of Pace.

"Can you give me any lines on the man, Swaley?
I'd like to know a bit about the men he hung around with, the men who worked on any of the jobs with him. I don't think he'd be the type to work alone all the time. If I can gather something about his background I might be able to work on it. Or shall I leave that end of it to you?"

"I'd rather handle it myself. If I strike anything hot I'll give you a ring. I'm going along to the Yard now to have a few words with the man who handled Pace's

last case-his last conviction, I mean."

"All right, Swaley. I'll be glad to hear from you.

So long."

Mick called on Joanna Peters, found the girl in good spirits, none the worse for her alarming experience. He drove to his office.

"There's been an urgent telephone call for you from Mr. Striberg," said Constance Wheeler. "He said you are to abandon the case at once. He wants you to do nothing further in the matter. He also said that he will forward a cheque at once to compensate you for what you have done, but he wishes you to know that he has most definitely dispensed with your services. I tried to argue with him, but was no use. The man sounded to me as though he was scared stiff about something."

## CHAPTER FIVE

### STARTLING EVENTS

I'M NOT at all surprised," said Mick. "In fact, I was quite ready to receive that news at any moment. Get him on the telephone for me."
"Wait a moment. He said he did not want to hear

from you or see you any more, and he expressly said that he did not want you to ring him."

"Don't worry about that, Beautiful. Get him on the

line, please."

The call came through a couple of minutes later. Mick Cardby said:

"Don't get panic-stricken, Mr. Striberg. This is

Cardby speaking." "I mustn't talk to you. Please don't speak to me again. I said you must not telephone me. I am posting a cheque to you for twenty guineas. And as far as I am concerned that is the end of the matter."

"Hold your horses, and don't ring off for a moment. Something, or somebody, has given you one helluva fright. You'd better tell me all about it. Maybe there isn't any cause for you to be scared after all."

"I'm not going to talk. I dare not talk. Don't telephone me again."

phone me again.'

"Mr. Striberg, I'm investigating a matter now that means more to me than the loss of your furs. The man who threatened you has also been busying himself threatening me. And I am not going to stand for it. I want to know what threat was used to make you

"All right, have it your own way. I'll tell you, and then I never want to hear from you again. At about throw in your hand." midnight last night a man rang me up. I don't know who he was. He said that if I didn't force you to stop your investigation he would see that I arrived in hospital for a few months. I told the man that I would not be threatened like that, and I said I certainly wanted you to continue with your inquiries until you discovered who stole my furs. The man laughed, and said he would give me one small demonstration to prove that he meant every word he said. Well, Mr. Cardby, he has given me what he called a small demonstration."

"You haven't been hurt at all, I hope, Mr. Striberg."

"Not physically, no. But in the early hours of this morning my warehouse, with everything in it, was burnt down to the ground!"

"Hell's bells! you are quite sure that it was not a

sheer accident?"

"Positive! A couple of hours ago the same man rang me up to tell me that he had fired the place just to show me that he meant business. He said that his next demonstration—if he had to stage one—would not be anything as simple as a warehouse fire. He would get me instead. Now you know why I cannot employ you, or speak to you, any more."

Cardby whistled softly. The pace was certainly quickening, and the sudden moves were doing nothing

to help. He tried to persuade Striberg:

"You are playing into the hands of this party, Mr. Striberg, by telling me to abandon the case. They would be amused to see how easily they had achieved their objective. I don't think that you are being at all wise."

"Perhaps not; but my decision is final. I don't regard it as any small matter when my entire warehouse is burnt out, and I am sure that the person who would turn to arson would not think twice about injuring me. I feel very deeply about the loss of my furs, and the loss of my big warehouse, but they don't mean much to me compared with my health. I can afford the loss of the money better than I can the loss of an eye or a leg, or something like that. I am sorry, Mr. Cardby, that I am compelled to dispense with your services in this abrupt manner, but you are enough of a man of the world to appreciate just how I am placed. I can't help it."

"You spoke to this person twice. Was there nothing about the voice you could recognise? I have an idea

that I know the person who called you."

"I am saying nothing. Even if I had an idea I would not talk about it. Take it from me, Mr. Cardby, that

the whole business is a closed book."

"Wait a moment. I am not the only person investigating the robbery at your place. The official police are more than slightly interested. What do you intend to do about them? You can't tell them to cease making inquiries, can you? They wouldn't take to it in a very kindly way."

"They will get no further assistance from me. I am The man in the clear as far as they are concerned. on the telephone never even mentioned them. His only concern was that you should be called off the case."

"So he doesn't expect the police to have any success,

Mr. Striberg?"

"Apparently not. In any event, he said nothing whatever about them."

"All right, Mr. Striberg. I realise that I am banging my head against a stone wall, and that is not one of my pastimes. One day you may regret what you are doing now. But that is purely your concern. I feel certain that I could have produced some worthwhile results if I had continued with the job. Ah, well, it only remains for me to wish you the best of luck. And be careful what you tell the investigators from the insurance company about that fire. If you tell them the truth I don't think they will like it. At least, I'm damned sure they won't fancy paying out over the stolen furs when they know that you have sacked me. Think it over."

Cardby lit a cigarette and pulled at it savagely. It was not the first time that one of his clients had been intimidated into giving the firm of Cardby and Son their marching orders. Yet this time the position was considerably different. Mick had begun to take a most personal interest in the affairs of Cuthbert Kendal.

He walked into the outer office.

"Have we got anything else on the books, Angelic?" he asked Constance Wheeler. "Now that I'm sacked

I want something to occupy my mind."

"There's nothing whatever on the books. The slate is clean. You've been talking for a long time about taking a holiday, so why not try it now?" 41

"I think I will. There's one call I have to make in the City, and then I'll pack my bag. Tell my father

I'll be back here in about an hour."

Mick headed immediately for Kendal's office in Cheapside. The two girls were surprised when he arrived. He smiled cheerily, pushed back the small swing gate, and crossed over to Kendal's office. Before they had recovered from the shock their abrupt caller had vanished.

Cuthbert Kendal was reading a catalogue. He elevated his eyebrows when he saw the detective, flung the book down on his desk, and jumped to his feet. Then he flung out an arm, and pointed towards the door as he said:

"Get out and stay out! I want nothing to do with

you. Now beat it!"

"Control those nerves, brother. I've dropped in for a short talk."

"There isn't going to be any talk—short or otherwise.

Clear off."

"Not this child. I'll say my piece before I leave here. Things have been happening since I was last in this office, Kendal, and I'm such a peculiar young man that I object to those happenings. For instance, last night a neat arrangement was made for me to be murdered."

"What a pity it didn't succeed! I'd like to have

heard the news."

Cuthbert was devastatingly cold and calm. He realised now that the interview was inevitable. So he accepted the position without argument.

"Men don't arrange to have me rubbed out, and get away with it. It has been tried before, Kendal, and I've

always finished on the winning end."

"I can't see for a second why your personal affairs should have any interest for me. Apart from the fact that I hate the sight of you I haven't any interest in you or your affairs. And if people want to have you murdered, they can go ahead with the idea, and I'll give my blessing!"

"The same kind of blessing that was given to little

Ernie Pace?"

It said much for Cuthbert's nervous system that not

a trace of any emotion showed on his face, and the hand outstretched for the packet of cigarettes displayed not the slightest quiver. He could take it.

"I know nothing about the man, or his blessings. Since you are mostly supposed to be a busy man, don't

you think you're wasting your time?"

"Not exactly. There's another small matter I wished to mention. Last night-or early this morning-your friend Striberg was burnt out. Did you happen to telephone Striberg last night before the fire occurred ? "

"I did not. Still, I'm sorry to hear about the fire. The poor man seems to be having more than his share

of bad luck. I must speak to him."

"I suppose you guessed that he would sack me, Kendal? Are you going to ring the man so that you can congratulate him? It would be a friendly act so long as you used your voice with a certain amount of discretion."

"There are moments when I wonder whether you are right in the head. I must confess that you don't

give much evidence of complete sanity."

"They also doubt the mental capacity of people who commit arson."

"Is there anything at all you wish to say before you

leave here?"

"Yes, just a few things. When Alicia Armstrong was murdered you were a lucky man. Now you have been lucky for the second time. The luck, Kendal, will not run with you forever. One day you'll make a mistake. Men of your type always end up with some small slip. And when that day arrives you will be finding me standing by your elbow. I'm mad enough to think that you owe me plenty, and I won't be content until I can start doing some collecting. Make your hay while the sun is shining, Kendal, because when the storm does break there won't be much left of anything for you to harvest. That isn't a threat. It is a promise. And I'm also mad enough to regard a promise as something that must be kept."

"You should have been on the stage, Cardby. Speeches sound good in the theatre, but they sound damned silly in an office like this. You know you have nothing on me, and I know that you never will have. So why should I worry? Go and peddle your threats among a few old ladies. There's a bare chance that they might be quite impressed. I am not. That's all."
"You will be one day, Kendal. We'll be meeting

again. When that day does come round I don't think

you'll be sitting back with a satisfied smile."

"If I'm not you'll be such an old man that it wouldn't

matter to you."

"I'll be on my way. There's just one final word. If any person takes a crack at me during the next few days, or the next few weeks, I'll be looking for you. Bear that in your mind, Kendal, and it might save you from arriving at the receiving end of what was promised to Striberg."

"I am terrified. See that you keep out of my way

in the future."

The men bowed towards each other with mock ceremony, and Cardby left the building. Cuthbert Kendal walked round and round his office for ten minutes. He had not cause to feel disconsolate. Once again he had boxed cleverly, and got away with it. He thought it was no mean achievement to throw a spanner into the works of Mick Cardby. To celebrate the event he telephoned Zena, told her that he was taking the remainder of the day off, and that he would take her to a matince. She was charmed. So was Cuthbert. He thought that if the show happened to be really good he might even forget the woman sitting by his side.

In any case, Cuthbert decided that a brief rest would be both wise and welcome. He knew only too well that he had scrambled out of a hot spot. And during his days in the States the boys had taught him the wisdom of fading away until the heat had died down. He even thought he might take a holiday. It was true that a few promising propositions were in the offing, but they could wait. Before long Mick Cardby would surely be tied up with another case. And that would be an appropriate moment to make another move. The next act he staged would require some thought. He did not intend to ask for trouble. It should be easy to

work on a job far removed from Cardby's sphere of activities. For instance, there was the pretty set-up at the Castor Club. The plum looked ready to be picked. It was only a matter of organising, of boxing cleverly . . . Cuthbert banished the thought from his mind. The job could wait until his name was no longer flaming in Cardby's memory. Kendal was not compelled to hurry. He had accumulated quite a supply of cash. He sighed contentedly, and strolled out to buy a drink before meeting Zena in the West End.

While Cuthbert sat in the stalls at the Palace Theatre, Mick Cardby was steering his car towards the coast. Murder and other oddments of crime were forgotten. Cardby was wondering whether at the end of two weeks he could reduce his golf handicap from four to the fantastic figure of scratch. Cuthbert wondered whether a lay-off of a month would be long enough to clear the air. Both men felt quite happy . . .

# CHAPTER SIX

## MONEY FOR NOTHING

LADY ELLA WAIN was the remnants of a beautiful woman. During her hey-day at the London Pavilion she had the Men-about-Town wallowing around her feet. In those days she had the face and the figure-and knew well how to use both of them. Sir Andrew Wain fell for her with such aplomb that he was caught on the rebound, and one day found himself standing by her side in a Registry Office. Since Sir Andrew was the only child of a multi-millionaire father, Ella threw in her hand at the London Pavilion, and settled down

to learn the impossible job of how to become a lady.

For nearly twenty years her life was sedate and moderately happy. Sir Andrew's affection declined a little when her figure started to expand, and nature had to be accepted. to be assisted more and more with her face. But he was at all times sympathetic and considerate. world was no longer at her feet, but her money attracted a sycophantic following. Their resplendent parties at the South Audley Street mansion attracted many people. Some of them wanted to interest Sir Andrew in business, some wanted to borrow money, and most of them wanted free food and drink. Ella was certain that she was still the magnate. It wasn't pleasant for her to think otherwise. On the Wednesday morning before Ascot Week, she was reclining on a divan in their Chinese Room. Her dressmaker had just left, and Ella felt exhausted after choosing her twelve frocks for "the Week." A maid stepped into the room to announce that a visitor had arrived.

"I'm too tired to see anyone at the moment," said her Ladyship. "Tell the person to call again, and

then I might feel that I can see them."

The door opened behind the maid, and a man walked into the room. He was rather rotund, aged about forty, and his smile was pleasant. But there was no answering smile on Ella's face when the stranger said to the maid:

"You may retire now. Thank you very much for

showing me in. Good-bye."

Without stopping to think what she was doing, the maid walked out, and closed the door. Maybe the man had an authoritative manner. Lady Wain slid her feet off the divan, and stood up. Her face was flushed.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she asked.
"What right have you to order my maid about? And who are you in any case? I don't remember you at all,

and I certainly did not invite you to come here."

"The meaning of the intrusion I will explain in a moment. I ordered the maid out of the room because you wouldn't like her to hear what I'm going to say to you. You don't remember me because you've never met me before. I agree that I was not invited. Now that I've answered each of your questions I think we can settle down to a comfortable chat. Do you mind if I smoke? Perhaps you would even condescend to take one yourself?"

Lady Ella Wain was quickly becoming dazed. The stranger talked almost as though he owned the house. She began to feel his unusual powers of domination.

She pushed his cigarette case away, and he bowed as he lit a smoke. Calmly, he surveyed the room as though appraising the value of the contents. Certainly he was in no hurry to open the conversational ball. Ella became more nervous as she waited for him to make a start.

"A very beautiful home you have here, Lady Wain. It must be very nice to have a millionaire husband. I

suppose you wouldn't like to lose him?"

Ella was visibly startled. She wondered whether the man was right in the head. She stared at him, and became more uncomfortable. He showed no sign of insanity. In fact, he handed her a most disarming smile.

"Don't get worried yet," he said. "You don't know why I've called. You can do all your worrying very shortly. Lady Wain, I've called here to tell you a little story. I don't think you'll enjoy it, but you will at least recognise it as a perfectly true story, and that's always an asset."

"But I don't want to hear a story from you, or from

"You are going to hear it all the same, so the best thing you can do is to reseat yourself on the divan, and open your ears for a short time."

The man arranged his cushion more comfortably,

and smiled once again.

"I'm going to put the clock back for twenty-five years," he announced. "You were seventeen then, Lady Wain. I bet in those days you were worth travelling a few miles to see. You've got plenty of that appearance still left-if I may say so. In those days you were a front-line chorus girl, but you hadn't got beyond the stage of touring with third rate revues. I'll bet you didn't get more than two pounds ten a week. I'm thinking, too, that in those days, and at that age, you were very impressionable. I was myself. It is a very dangerous period in one's life, I think.

"But I mustn't start turning philosopher. I didn't come here to preach. While you were at Leeds you met a young man. I don't think I have to remind you that his name was Gordon Raynes. He fell for you

in a big way, and you thought he was pretty grand, too. The infatuated young man gave up his job, and followed you about the country for a few weeks. Do I have to tell you what the final consequence was? Perhaps it would be as well, since your memory must be very faulty. While you were playing at the Blackpool

Winter Gardens you married Gordon Raynes!

"I'm cutting your history short, although I'm positive that I am not in the least boring you. For a year you spent your week-ends with him. He wanted you to forsake the stage, and you refused. Your insistence upon a theatrical career caused plenty of trouble between you. It ended with the pair of you parting. You were barely eighteen when the final split came. After less than a year of married life you walked out on Gordon Raynes. I can't say that he was brokenhearted. Perhaps you were right in thinking that one day you would hit the top lines on the stage. You certainly did. And when you were twenty-six you married Sir Andrew Wain, and decided that it was better to be the wife of a multi-millionaire than to be a revue star. Most people would agree with you.

"Well, Lady Wain, I said that you had a bad memory. You even forgot to get a divorce from Gordon Raynes. You forgot to mention to Sir Andrew that you were married. And you totally omitted to tell the Registrar that you were committing bigamy. In this country the law doesn't smile upon people who do that. They

put them in the dock at the Old Bailey."

Lady Ella Wain was swaying. The rouge looked incongruous on her pallid cheeks, and her eyes had widened pathetically. Her lips felt as though they might crack, and she could not stop her hands twitching. The man handed out another smile, and remarked almost affectionately: "I suppose you are beginning to guess why I have made this call?"

"No," lied her Ladyship. "I have no idea what brought you here."

"You soon will have a very definite idea about it," he said callously. "I take it that you don't for a moment repudiate anything I have said?"

Lady Wain shook her head. She saw the man smile

again, and he thrust something into her hand. Before she looked at it he remarked:

"I brought this along in case you were tempted to

start an argument."

She looked at the paper. It was a copy of her marriage certificate. He pulled out another from his pocket-a copy of the certificate of her marriage to Sir Andrew Wain. Again he smiled as he said to her :

"They look very pretty side by side. Really, you

ought to frame them."

Neither spoke for sometime. The man stubbed out his cigarette, said: "Your husband gives you a most generous allowance, Lady Wain. I have come here to suggest a manner in which you can dispose of some of it."

"You mean that you have come here to start

blackmailing me?"

"What a nasty mind you have, Lady Wain! I have called here because I think that you have too much money, and I'm going to make your life much happier by relieving you of the responsibility of looking after some of it. So let us see what an arrangement we can make. The demand is really quite simple. I'm giving you the chance to earn, or purchase, your peace of mind. It will cost you five thousand pounds a year, and the first payment is due this week. Do you find that quite satisfactory?"

"Five thousand pounds! I haven't got that amount

of money. It is absurd!"

"Don't talk such utter rubbish, Lady Wain. Why, your jewels are worth a hundred thousand, and you can always realise cash on some of them."

"My husband would miss them immediately. I dare

not do that."

"Quit stalling. You've got more jewellery than you can ever wear. Are you trying to tell me that Sir Andrew has an inventory of the sparklers, and checks up on them every night? I'm not altogether a fool."

"My full allowance is only two thousand a year. would be impossible for me to produce five thousand pounds. What do you intend to do if I refuse? I suppose you would go immediately to Sir Andrew?"

"Naturally, we would feel it our duty to inform him, but our first action would be to see that the law of this country is not flaunted. So our first step would naturally be to inform the police. Perhaps they would save us the trouble of informing Sir Andrew that he's been living for years with a mistress. I am sure he would be most peeved—particularly since he has fond ambitions of becoming an M.P. shortly."

Lady Ella Wain fainted. As she slumped back on the divan the man did not flicker an eyelid. Instead, he lit another smoke, folded his arms, and sat looking at her. It was a full five minutes before she opened her eyes. She sounded weak and weary as she said to him:

eyes. She sounded weak and weary as she said to him:
"Press that bell near the fireplace. I want the maid
to bring me some brandy. I am sure that in another
minute I shall faint again."

The caller pushed the bell button, and said easily to

her:

"When the maid comes in, tell her to bring a drink

of brandy for me."

The maid arrived. Lady Wain followed her instructions like a child. The brandy brought some colour back into her face, a little more life into her eyes. But she still swayed unsteadily. The man decided to change his plan of action. There was not much to gain by continuing the discussion while the woman was in a mental daze. He rose to his feet, and said:

"I will leave you now in order that you can consider my proposal. I will return at this time tomorrow. Then you can tell me on which date you will deliver the money, or I will tell you at what time I go to the police station. Remember that if you communicate what I have said to you to any other party, I will act without any delay. Good-day, Lady Wain."

The man bowed with affected ceremony, and marched out of the room. It was more than an hour before Lady Wain moved from the divan. And then her legs wobbled like sticks of jelly. She was all in.

Her strange caller kept his word. At the same time, almost to the tick of the clock, he visited the house gain. This time he noticed that there was no demurabout meeting him. Lady Wain was pale and wan.

His previous visit had undone all the good the beauty parlours had ever accomplished.

"I trust," he said, "that you have reached a wise decision, Lady Wain."

"I haven't slept all night," she remarked. "You! have nearly killed me. What sort of guarantee have I got that you won't come back to tell me that you want more money? I've heard of things like that happening."

"Lady Wain, I told you what money we wanted.

That is all I have to say."
"Very well," she said, "and I have decided to pay you. There is nothing else I can do. I told you that I haven't got that amount of money. What I propose to do should suit you just as well. I will hand over some of my jewellery to you, and you can sell it. I dare not do it myself."

The man shook his head at once. The gesture was

emphatic.

"No, no," he said. "If I did that you could circulate the story that the jewellery has been stolen, and then where am I? You will have to sell it yourself, Lady Wain, and I have only called to discover on what day, and at what time, I am to call here for the money. Just tell me that."

"You seem to be doing your best to make things awkward for me. But if you will come round at three o'clock on Friday afternoon, I will do my best to have the money waiting for you. If I haven't got it by then you will know that I have had some trouble in

getting rid of the jewellery."

"I hope for your sake that there is no difficulty. I am not the most patient man in the world. I won't detain you now, Lady Wain. I'll be back on Friday, and I only hope that you have the money waiting in your hand." And once again he bowed with mock solemnity before leaving the room.

On the Friday morning Lady Ella Wain sold three rings and a brooch. In the afternoon she paid over the five thousand pounds. At the end of a month she had almost forgotten the unpleasant episode. Life had settled back into its old routine, and the memory of the man started to fade. But he came back into her life with a sudden jolt. One morning she was reading the paper, when the maid announced that she had a caller. Lady Wain was about to state that she was busy, when the man repeated his previous performance, and walked into the room. Poor Ella felt her heart perform a somersault. She hadn't expected to see him for eleven months.

"I've got some bad news for you," he said, when the door was closed. "I did not act previously on my own behalf. I acted on behalf of another party, my principal. Unfortunately, that gentleman has sustained a very heavy loss in a Stock Exchange transaction. He has asked me to tell you that at the end of this Account he has to find for his broker three thousand pounds more than he possesses. He thought that his best plan was to apply to you for the necessary financial assistance. I told him that since you were so heavily indebted to him it was hardly likely that you would refuse this request. Now you know exactly why I am here."

"This is just what I was frightened of," said Ella. "I asked you if you would be coming back for more,

and you told me that you would not."

"How could we have known at that time that a sudden slump on the Stock Exchange would have created such a position? My principal has been very badly hit, and you are the only person to whom he can appeal."

"Even then I would have no guarantee whatever that you wouldn't be back again in a month's time.

This seems to be a never-ending business."

"Then you desire me to tell him that you refuse to give him any help, and that it would be better for him to approach the police without delay? I am certain that he would not hesitate about doing it, Lady Wain."

"All right, all right! Come here on Tuesday morning, and I'll let you have the money. But if you try to repeat this performance I will have to refuse, and take whatever the consequence may be. This is quite final."

"I will convey that message to my principal," said

Wain, I'd like to give you a word of advice before I go. Don't get your name too much into the papers. When my principal read that Sir Andrew had bought the Keller necklace for thirty thousand pounds, he started to envy you quite considerably. Better keep that necklace in a very safe spot. If the stones were taken out, they would sell separately for quite a sum of money. We may talk about it one day. I am glad that you have decided to act sensibly. It saves a lot of trouble, and keeps you out of the Old Bailey. Wouldn't the newspapers love the story of your trial for bigamy? But publicity like that doesn't pay."

Lady Ella paid the man. But in the meantime she

Lady Ella paid the man. But in the meantime she had been doing quite an amount of hard thinking. Ella was no fool. She had been brought up in a tough and practical manner by working parents. Now she could see the red lamp of danger burning brightly. She knew for a certainty that the man would come back for more money. Once he thought that he had found a perpetual fount of money for nothing he would keep tapping it. She knew that the eight thousand she had paid was merely a mild commencement. So one morning Ella drove to the offices of a famous firm of lawyers. The senior partner saw her personally. He could see some good money in the offing. Lady Wain unburdened her heart, and told him the complete story. He had heard many, many of them during his forty

"Of course," said the solicitor, "your best course would be to inform the police. I feel sure, Lady Wain, that if you would give evidence against that man when he was charged with blackmail, the police would agree to forget the—ah—indiscretion of your youth. And I am sure they would see that your name was not revealed

"I would not do that," she said. "The news would be certain to leak out. So often when there has been a 'Mr. A.' or someone like that in a case, I have had people telling me the person's full name before the first day's hearing was over. I dare not risk stopping the man in that way. It would mean social suicide for me,

and disgrace for Sir Andrew. Can't you think of a more private manner in which it can be done?"

"It isn't easy, Lady Wain. Your trouble is that you've got to frighten the man to such an extent that he never returns. But wait a moment. I can see one possible way in which it might be done. A young private detective named Mick Cardby has built up a great name for himself. I'll telephone him at once and ask him if he can come round and hear your story. From what I've been told I should imagine that he would be the very person to handle this case. I'm sure that you can place confidence in him. Now, if you will excuse me for a moment I'll see if I can contact him. I should have thought of that young man before. Silly of me."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

#### PLAYING FOR POSITION

MICK CARDBY heard the story through without passing a comment. He had handled many similar cases. It was the solicitor who reduced the matter to an entirely business level. Cardby retired while he discussed the position with his client, and when Mick returned he said to him:

"There must be no publicity whatever, Mr. Cardby, if you accept the case. I have heard that your methods are unorthodox, and that I do not mind, but you must not play your hand in such a way that her Ladyship gets placed under a searchlight. I am instructed to offer you a hundred guineas as a retaining fee, and Lady Wain is willing to pay you another five hundred guineas if you clear up the matter finally and completely."

"I accept the case on those terms. Let's make a start, Lady Wain. What was Gordon Raynes by trade,

calling-or whatever he had ?"

"He was a research man with a wireless firm. I never knew him do any other work than that. But I'm sure he has got nothing to do with it."

"I'm not suggesting that he has, but I'm going to find him. Can you assist me by telling me where he might be, or have you lost all touch?"

"I have heard nothing of him, and seen nothing of him for nearly twenty-five years, and I haven't the

slightest idea where he is living."

"We get nowhere by taking that answer as complete. He must have some relatives, you know. Where do his father and mother live, Lady Wain?"

"At Leeds. They may be there now, as far as I know. I can't help you."

"Do you know the name of the street they live in,

or used to live in?"

"Oh, I can tell you that, because I went along there a few times. It is a small house in Edmund Street,

but I can't tell you the number."

"I'll manage without that. Very well, Lady Wain, I will travel to Leeds later in the day. While I am investigating the matter I will not come near you. That would be most unwise. If I require information from you I will communicate with your solicitor. He can comfortably act as agent for both of us. I don't think there is anything further for me to say except this-let me know at once if this man calls with any further demand. There is a chance that if I had a word with him he might decide that the game is not worth the candle. I won't waste any more time now.
I'll make a report to your solicitor immediately I have discovered something of real value. Don't pay any further money, Lady Wain. You have been bled sufficiently already. I hope I succeed for you. Goodday."

It was early on the following morning when Mick Cardby called at the humble house in Edmund Street. The Raynes were still in residence. Cardby had not expected that they would have moved. People of that type mostly remain settled for life. They gave him their son's address without even asking him why he required it, or who he was. Gordon Raynes lived not more than a ten-minute walk away. Mick strode round, and found Raynes was living on a nondescript estate of

council houses.

Mick rapped on the door, and a moment later he had plenty explained to him that had puzzled him all the way on his trip from London. Gordon Raynes, he had been arguing, must have known that his wife had risen to be the bright star of the London Pavilion. He had seen pictures of her in hundreds of papers, and the Press had made a considerable splash of her marriage to Sir Andrew Wain. So why had Gordon Raynes kept quiet all the time? Surely he might have raised a mild voice of protest?

Now Mick was provided with the answer. A blowsy young woman opened the door. She carried a twelve months old baby in her arms. Mick told her that he had travelled a fair distance to have a word with Gordon

Raynes.

"He's at the shop," said the woman. "You'd better get along there to him. He started work a couple of hours ago. Know where to find the shop?"

He explained that he did not. She gave him the necessary information. "Excuse me, madam," said Mick, "but would you mind telling me your name?"

"My name?" The woman threw back her head, and glared at him. "What do you think my name is, eh? Mrs. Gordon Raynes, of course! What else could it be? Of all the questions to ask a decent married woman!"

Mick beat a hasty retreat. He could see that the woman was just about to get into her stride, and he didn't intend staying until she reached the peak of her form. Mrs. Gordon Raynes! It was no longer surprising that the man had remained dumb about his wife's indiscretion. The pair were in the same boat. Cardby smiled. He found the position quite amusing.

He had no difficulty in finding the shop, and the luck was still with him. Gordon Raynes was brought out from the workshop at the back. He was an old young man. Although in the early forties, he had lost most of his hair, and his face was pale and cadaverous. The

man looked really ill.

Cardby drew the man to one side, and wondered how to start work on him. He decided that nothing would be gained by any finesse. He said:

"Mr. Raynes, I've called to ask you a few questions about a very private matter. The matter concerns your -ah-your first wife. Don't look startled, Mr. Raynes. Before I go any further, I want you to accept my promise that these inquiries have got nothing whatever to do with the police, or with any form of prosecution in which you would be at all involved. You must have told some people that you were married to Lady Ella Wain. Maybe you were drunk, perhaps you said it in a spirit of bravado. But I am certain that you did make that statement. Now, what I want from you are the names of the people you have said that to."

"Oh, mister, I couldn't give you the names. I got married myself three years ago, and then I stopped talking about it. I thought I'd land myself into the soup if I wasn't careful. But maybe in the years before I got married again I might have told a hundred people. That's why I can't give you any names. Would you

tell me what's gone wrong, mister?"

"I will. Lady Ella Wain is being blackmailed by a man who knows that she has committed bigamy. I am trying to discover how he came to hear about it. And you are the most likely person to have spilled the

"Hell, but I'm sorry to hear that. I had my troubles with Ella, but I never wanted her to come to any harm. I'll do anything I can to help you, mister, if you'll tell

me what I can do."

"Thanks a lot. You say that you stopped talking about this affair three years ago. Well, I can't believe the blackmailer has kept all this valuable information under his hat for three years. It doesn't sound feasible to me. I'm guessing that you've mentioned the matter much more recently, and that you mentioned it not to a friend, but to a stranger. I'm not trying to hurry you, but think of what I have suggested, and then see if you can remember any such thing happening within, say, the last two or three months. Remember that I suggested it might be a stranger."

Gordon Raynes thought long and furiously. Cardby was delighted when Raynes suddenly clapped his hands

together, and said to him:

"I think I have got what you want, mister. This fits in with all that you've said. A couple of months ago I was in the saloon bar of the Bear Hotel. Some men were arguing Communism or something like that, and one of them was saying aristocrats should be abolished because they were a rotten lot. They got pretty excited, and then the man who wanted to see the aristocracy flung out pointed to me, and pitched the tale about Lady Ella Wain. I had told him years before. He only mentioned it to show that titled people are all wrong. I'm sure now, mister, that that was when the damage was done, and I'll tell you why I say it.

"There was a stranger sitting in the bar, and he was listening to the argument, and saying nothing. After the man had talked about Lady Ella Wain, this stranger came over and sat beside me, and bought me a drink. In fact, he bought me five or six drinks. And he asked me a whole lot of questions. Was the man lying? Was I Lady Wain's real husband? When did I marry her? Where did I marry her? What was my name? I reckon I must have taken too much to drink, because I babbled out all the answers to him. I am sure, mister,

that you'll find that's where the trouble started."

"It certainly sounds more than likely. Did this man happen to give you his name, or did he tell you anything about himself?"

"He didn't give me his name, but he told me that he was a manufacturers' agent, and had to travel around a

lot. I didn't ask him any questions."

"Did he happen to mention during the conversation where his head offices were? Did he tell you where he was going when he left Leeds?"

"Yes, back to London. He said his offices were in

the City, mister."

"I think the best thing you can do is to give me the closest possible description of this man. I'm never

bored by details, Mr. Raynes."

"I'll do my best. The thing I noticed more than anything else about him were his hands. They were long and thin, and looked as though he'd never used them for anything in his life. They looked like a

woman's hands. He had brown eyes, and curly hair, and I remember that his teeth were very good. He wasn't a big man. I'd put him at about five feet ten. And that, mister, is about all I can tell you about him."

"You've done well," said Cardby grimly. His ears had opened wide when he heard the mention of a manufacturers' agent, and opened still wider at the mention of the offices in the City. But Gordon Raynes had now given him an unmistakable description of Cuthbert Kendal!

An hour later Mick Cardby was settled down in the train on his return trip to London. He could afford to smile a little. Things were working out very nicely, and as the train travelled on he was planning a course of action. He would have to step most warily now that Cuthbert Kendal had arrived in the middle of the picture. He must leave no loose ends.

When he arrived in Town he made his first call on Lady Ella Wain-at her solicitor's office after Cardby

had made the appointment.

"I have done all I can, Lady Wain," he said, "and there is no further work I can usefully do until I have met the man who has been making the demands. I will have to sit back and do nothing until I hear that he has made another call upon you. If and when he does call you must postpone your answer, and fix an appointment with him. Then let me know the time and place through your solicitor, and I will attend to the man. Whatever you do, Lady Wain, don't part with any more money. That would be stupid."

"I will do what you suggest, Mr. Cardby. Have you got to the bottom of the matter yet? Please don't tell me that Gordon Raynes is mixed up in it. I could never believe that he would do anything like that."

"He is entirely in the clear. I am satisfied that he has no direct connection with the matter whatever. Don't forget to let me know immediately that man calls

on you again. Now, I am en my way."

Mick employed a man to keep an eye on Kendal's office, and then he settled down to wait. It was a wearing business, but he kept telling his father that it was worth it. As he stated over and over again:

"I don't care a hoot if I have to wait for another ten years, I am going to end up by putting the skids under Cuthbert Kendal. That bloke has been a bit too smart for me each time I've started a line of inquiry, but the luck won't be with him for ever, and then I'm going to sit back with a big smile. Don't worry, Dad,

my day will come."

"So long as you're not in the grave before you get the break you need. I don't think, Mick, that Kendal does have a lot of luck. That's where I reckon you make the mistake. Kendal is damned clever, and I think you are mistaking his use of intelligence for strokes of luck. Take him as a cunning devil, and you'd have a better chance of pinning something on him. It seems to me that Cuthbert Kendal always plans well in advance."

"Never mind, Dad, that won't stop me getting him

where I want him."

On a Thursday afternoon Lady Ella Wain's solicitor

telephoned him:

"That man has called on my client again, and a further demand has been made. Lady Wain followed your instructions, and the man is calling at her house at ten o'clock in the morning. Have you any instructions?"

"Yes. Tell her that I will see her at your office in an hour's time. I want to arrange a small party, and I want some advice from her."

"She will be here in an hour, Mr. Cardby."

" And so will I."

### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### ANOTHER FAILURE

"I'LL tell you," Mick said to Lady Wain, "what you ought to do, and then I want you to tell me what you want me to do. There is a very big difference between the two. I should grab this man by the back of the neck, and take him to the nearest police station. The

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police would charge him with blackmail, your name would never be divulged, and that would be the end of the matter. That would be the proper course for me to take; and it would be the one most likely to give you permanent peace. I realise that you may have very definite views about my idea, so I want to know just what is on your mind. Then we can work out what is to be done."

"If there is any other way out of it, I don't want the police to hear anything about the case. I believe I would rather go on paying than I would see that man arrested, and know that I've got to stand in the witnessbox, and admit that I have committed bigamy. No, Mr. Cardby, you must not have the man arrested. What other course do you think you could adopt to ensure that the 'demands will stop, and there will be no

"There is one other way, but it has its dangers. During the course of my inquiries, I have discovered that the man who has been calling on you is not the man who invented the scheme. He is merely acting as an agent on behalf of that man. I am sure that I know the man who arranged it all. I think our only plan, since you will have nothing to do with the police, is to scare both those men. My proposition is quite simple. I want to hear what this man has to say to you when he calls. Then I'll collect him, and take him along to the offices of the man who employed him. When I get the pair of them in front of me, I'll talk to them. And by the time I have finished, I believe they will have lost a lot of enthusiasm."

"I think your suggestion is admirable," said the solicitor. "Having a legal brain, it has just occurred to me that I'd better accompany you in the morning. If that man starts talking to Lady Wain it would be safer for you to have my corroborative evidence. Don't you agree, Mr. Cardby ?"

"Without a doubt. I was going to make the

suggestion myself, sir."

"Very well. Lady Wain, how can you arrange that we overhear what is said? We don't want any sort of a hitch arising if we can help it." "I'll see to all that," said Mick. "If I can have an hour in the house this afternoon, I'll fix a microphone quite easily, and the rest of the job will be child's play.

Can you arrange for me to call, Lady Wain?"

At half-past nine on the following morning Mick and the solicitor were installed in a small room leading off the Chinese Room. Cardby had fixed the microphone underneath the divan, and everything was set for action. The lawyer was plainly nervous. This job was somewhat out of his line, and he felt none too comfortable.

The clock in the room was striking ten when the man arrived. Cardby was hoping that Lady Wain

would not crack under the strain.

"I take it," said the man without preamble, "that you've got a pretty good idea as to why I'm here? This time I'm not going to make excuses, and I'm not going to tell you any fairy tales. We want another three thousand pounds, and we will give you seven days in which to collect it."

"That is quite impossible," said Lady Wain, repeating the words taught her by Cardby. "You know that this is blackmail, and you've brought me to the end of my tether. I can't possibly raise any more money for

you."

"Then you must accept the consequences, and you know what that will mean to you. Do you think it is worth while to wreck your life for the sake of three thousand pounds? Isn't your happiness worth more to you than that amount of money? I think you are behaving very foolishly."

"You are asking me to do the impossible. I know that if I paid you the three thousand you are asking for, you would return again and again until you had bled me white. So I might just as well refuse here and now instead of bankrupting myself first. You will get no further money from me. Now, I suppose you are going to the police station?"

"Very shortly," said the man. "First of all, I must tell my principal that you are defying him, and he will decide what he intends to do. There is always a chance that he might invent something much worse for you than a visit to the police. My principal is a very astute man."

"Well, you can tell him from me that there will be

no more payments."

"I certainly will tell him. Whatever trouble arrives, Lady Wain, you must always remember that you have brought it on yourself. I'll be off."

The inner door opened, and Mick Cardby walked into

the room. He said:

"You're going to be off all right, and you are going to see your so-called principal. In fact, I'm going to conduct you personally to Mr. Cuthbert Kendal's Cheapside office! This time I fear you're for it.

The man paled a little, backed away towards the wall,

asked hoarsely:

"Are you Mick Cardby?"

"That's right. I'm sure dear Cuthbert has warned you quite often about me. You were the mug to start this game. Now I'm going to finish it for you. We've taken down all you've had to say. If you'd care to take a look underneath that divan you'll see the microphone I fixed there. Well, you had better get ready to meet

your great principal. I'm quite ready."

The man glanced round the room as though searching for a miraculous exit. Then his hand streaked down towards the side pocket of his coat. Cardby dived towards him head first. The man had a revolver half out of his pocket when the detective reached him. The force of the impact caused the man to jerk, and a bullet ploughed into the thousand pound carpet. Lady Wain uttered a weird wail, and flopped down on the divan. She took no further interest in the party. The solicitor chased across the room, and buried himself behind a high chair. He had never been taught anything about the professional conduct to be employed at such moments. The door opened, and a maid appeared. She took one look, screamed, and dashed out of the room, leaving the door open.

Cardby held the man by the wrist, and the men pitched over as they wrestled for the gun. The caller was stronger than he looked, and Mick found it hard to restrain him as he tugged and heaved to get the gun

out of his pocket. They rolled over, and Cardby crashed into a side table. His head hit the slender spar of the ornate furniture with such force that it snapped, and five thousand pounds' worth of precious jade was scattered over the floor. The blow gave Cardby a bad jolt, but he lashed out with his left fist, and felt the jar on his knuckles as he caught the man under the chin. He felt him slacken for a second, and took another crack at the chin. The man was obviously wilting, but he fought back, and Mick gasped painfully as a knee was plunged into the pit of his stomach. The wind seemed to be ripped out of him.

He changed his mind about the method of fighting, and took the man by surprise. Bending down quickly, and swinging to one side, he fastened his teeth in the back of the man's gun hand. The man bawled out with pain, and his grip on the gun loosened. Cardby bit until his teeth met. He could feel the warm blood oozing into his mouth. He tried an overhand left, and struck the man flush in the mouth. It gave Cardby quite an amount of satisfaction. He decided that the moment had arrived to take a gamble. He twisted away a little from the man, received a savage kick on the shins, and then gripped the man's right wrist

with both hands.

Cardby had a terrific power in his grip, and when he started to twist the man's wrist his opponent must have realised that he was on the losing end of the fight. He fought like a wild-cat, and he was striving to fling Cardby away from him by using his knees. Mick winced each time a knee crashed into him, but he hung on to the wrist with the tenacity of a bull terrier. The inevitable happened. The hand released its hold on the gun, and Cardby flung the man over on his face. Then he snatched at the wrist, and pulled up the man's arm in a half-Nelson. He called out:

"Mr. Solicitor, come out of your funk-hole for a moment, and take the gun out of this man's pocket. He can't hurt you, I'm holding him."

The lawyer advanced timidly, and he pulled the gun from the man's pocket with elaborate care. Maybe he

thought a bullet would smack into him at any moment.

He stood with the gun in his hands.

"Put it on the table in the far corner of the room," ordered Cardby. He got on his knees, and then pulled the man to his feet. Plenty of blood was adding colour to the pattern on the elegant carpet. The man opened his mouth, and spat out a string of lurid curses. Mick smacked him across the lips with his free hand. The curses ceased, and Cardby said:

"Now that you have had your little piece of enjoyment, I think we'll get along to see Mr. Cuthbert Kendal. And if he wants to start a gun fight it will be all right with me. Take my advice, and don't try anything else. If I become really annoyed I'll be inclined to hurt you seriously. Are you going quietly, or

shall I lay you out before we make a start?"

"I've got sense enough to know when I'm beaten," said the man. "I don't aim to cause any more trouble. You may find all the trouble you want when you get to Cheapside. The Boss won't like this at all, Cardby."

"That would break my heart, Mr. Solicitor, you'd better look after Lady Wain while I'm away. A good stiff drink wouldn't do her any harm. Come along, Tough Guy, and we'll see what your boss has got to say when he's listened to me for a few minutes. Remember, no funny business."

The man spat deliberately upon the carpet, and Cardby pushed him towards the chair on which his hat rested. The man picked it up, and Mick held him by

the arm as they marched out of the house.

The solicitor asked the frightened maid for a couple of brandies. He drank his own before he started to revive his client!

Mick hailed a cruising taxi, and gave the Cheapside address. He bundled the man into the taxi, and they

started on their way. "You may think you've done something clever," sneered the man, "but my idea is that you've started more than you can handle. If you think the Boss will let you get away with this you've got another thought coming to you. He hates outsiders to interfere with any job he works on."

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"I'm scared to death! If the day ever arrived, big boy, when a man like Cuthbert Kendal could make me nervous, I'd put up the shutters, and retire from business. I suppose you realise by now what sort of a fix you're in? You can't play that game, and get away with it forever. You may have thought it was money for nothing. Well, we'll see what it costs you eventually to collect easy money. What was your share of the cut?"

"I think you're backing the wrong horse, Cardby. You may have a helluva reputation, but you're no judge of men. Do you think for a moment that I would put in a squeal? No, sir. I'm not made that way. I reckon you've worked out what a mess you're putting Lady Wain into as a result of what you're doing now? If that is the way you work on behalf of your clients, Cardby, I'm damned sure I wouldn't like to employ you. I'd rather pay up than risk anything you might do. All you've done is to wreck that woman. Cuthbert Kendal will see that the world hears plenty about her, and her excursions into matrimony. He'll make her pay for this lot."

"I haven't yet decided what Kendal will have to pay

himself."

At the top of Ludgate Hill the taxi stopped. They had arrived in the middle of a bad traffic block. Cardby had loosened his grip on the man's arm, and was star-

ing through the side window, cursing the delay.

When the man moved Cardby was caught completely off his guard. The man wrenched himself free from the restraining grip, and before Mick could make a move he had flung back the door, and dived into the middle of the standing traffic. Mick followed him. And at that moment the traffic started to move again. The infuriated taxi-driver started to bellow. He was certain that he had been bilked. Cardby was dodging and weaving about among the moving vehicles. Wheels were scraping against his legs, and he missed the bonnet of an omnibus by inches as he made a dive in front of it. He felt sure that at any moment he would become a hospital case—unless he arrived beyond medical aid under the wheels of a 'bus.

He realised sorrowfully that he had lost the man. The moving traffic had hidden him from sight. Mick arrived on the pavement breathlessly, and looked eagerly to the east. He could see no sign of his quarry. Cardby was not unduly worried. He knew for a certainty what move the man would make. It was a cinch that he would travel as fast as his legs would carry him to Cuthbert Kendal's offices in Cheapside. Perhaps he thought that if he could pitch the story of the sad events before Cardby reached the offices, the ingenious Kendal would evolve a clever way out. Mick lengthened his stride, and hurried along the pavement towards Cheapside.

Cardby's hunch was right. The crowds on the city pavements looked with astonishment at the man racing along the pavements. He pushed pedestrians out of his way like flies. When he arrived at Kendal's office he was absolutely breathless, and Cuthbert received no mean shock when the man tore into his office. He didn't require to be told that something had gone wrong. All

the evidence was before him.

"Boss," said the man, "I've just got away from Mick Cardby, and he is sure to be here in a minute. What the hell shall I do now?"

Cuthbert Kendal crossed over the room and locked

the door.

"How much does Mick Cardby know?" he asked. "Make it snappy. Cardby is a fast worker, and we

can't talk when he is here. Hurry up, man."

"I don't think there is anything he doesn't know about it. He had a microphone fixed th the room, and heard all I had to say. And he knows you arranged the whole set-up, because he told me so. That bloke has put the skids under us properly. What the hell am I supposed to do now?"

Kendal sat back in his chair, and inquired quite

calmly:

"Did you ever tell Lady Wain that I had anything to do with this? Was my name mentioned at any time during your conversations ? "

"Never, Boss. I wouldn't do a thing like that. I'm

no squealer."

Cuthbert Kendal stared at the man, and slowly unfastened a drawer in the desk. At that moment Cardby commenced to hurl himself against the locked door. The man facing Kendal stared at the Boss with horror in his eyes. He had just noticed that Kendal had a gun in his hand.

"My God!" he said. "Are you aiming to shoot Mick

Cardby, Boss?"

"No," was the laconic reply. "I'm aiming to shoot

you! Here we go!"

He drew nearer to the man, placed the gun against his right temple, and pulled the trigger. The man had been too staggered to offer any sort of resistance. Cuthbert Kendal took a handkerchief from his breast pocket, and wiped the butt of the gun. Then he placed the weapon in the man's hand, walked over to the door, and unlocked it. Mick Cardby dashed into the room, saw the corpse, and wheeled to face Kendal. He shouted:

"You lousy cur, Kendal! You've shot your own man just as you shot Ernie Pace! They'll have you on the

gallows for this job before long!"

"Calm yourself," said Cuthbert. "I think you are more to blame for the man's death than I am. He burst in here in a most terrible state, and started babbling about you chasing him. I could see that he was almost insane. He asked me to help him, and I told him I didn't know what he was talking about. I said that if he had done something wrong I wanted no part in the proceedings, and he'd better stand up and take what was coming to him. Then you started banging on the door, and that seemed to make the man demented. He pulled out the gun, and bawled that you would never take him alive. I made a jump for him, but before I could reach him he blew his brains out. One day you must tell me what caused all this trouble. I must confess that I am entirely mystified."

"You damned liar, Kendal! This man hadn't got a gun. I took it away from him. You shot him because

he could have put you into the mire."

"He must have had another gun on him, Cardby. Even men with your brains can overlook things. I am

very distressed about all this. Excuse me while I telephone at once to the police. I must make a full statement to them immediately. You can tell them your

story at the same time."

Mick Cardby sat down, and subdued a groan. Kendal's story, he was sure, would impress any coroner. And Cardby could not tell the whole truth without turning the spotlight on his client. Without the evidence of the dead man he could pin nothing on Kendal. And Cuthbert smiled because he knew it. He actually beamed upon Cardby as he telephoned to the police.

Once again Cuthbert Kendal had boxed cleverly. They returned a verdict at the inquest of "suicide while

temporarily insane."

But Lady Ella Wain received no further blackmaffing demands!

## CHAPTER NINE

#### SINGULAR SCENES

It was shortly after one o'clock in the morning, and the Castor Club in Great Newport Street, Soho, was comfortably crowded. It was no fly-by-night club, certainly no "dive." The furnishings were ornate, the food was good, the dance band small and effective, and the management saw to it that their members, and their friends, came from the right places. It was perhaps a sign of the Castor's status that evening dress was compulsory, and that the slightest infraction of the rules led to an immediate inquiry, and frequently resulted in a request for resignation.

The guiding genius of the Castor was Percy Shadwell. He promenaded on the premises with great success. Percy had no mean personality. For ten years he had been a waiter. He hoarded his money, moved from job to job in the most select West End hotels, and made himself known to many people. When the time came for him to achieve his ambition and found a smart club for the upper strata of society, he had no difficulty in

securing a following. He restricted the number to a hundred. Perhaps seventy of them were well known to him. And they had recruited the other thirty from

among their friends.

For months he had moved from height to height. Why, he had even persuaded the wizard chef from the Cresta Hotel to move into the Club. He had engaged Ray Conway's famous band, and had collected half a dozen of the best waiters in town. At a cost of two guineas for dinner and dance the members were even permitted to watch a sparkling cabaret show. The fact that the drink bill could work out with great ease at three or four pounds a head did not disturb the members unduly.

On this evening in July, Percy Shadwell looked round the premises with justified satisfaction. He had just eaten a magnificent supper, realised that Jacques the chef was a nonpareil, and decided to congratulate him even more effusively than usual. Conway's band was drifting into the lilt of a waltz with impeccable rhythm, and the immaculate throng circling the floor advertised Shadwell's discretion and good taste. The Club had attained such distinction that membership was regarded

as no mean achievement. It was a social cachet.

A soft-footed waiter insinuated himself along the edge of the dance floor, and approached the great Shadwell with an air of deference.

"A gentleman has called, sir, and he is most anxious to have a word with you. I left him in your waiting-

room. What message have you, sir ?"

"Who is the person? You know that I refuse to see anyone other than a member during our opening hours. Tell him to call at eleven in the morning. They are beckoning you from number seven table. I thank you."

Percy drew gently on his expensive cigar, and gazed round the room once again. The waltz had ended, and people were drifting back to their tables. The band had been instructed not to race their numbers, to leave an adequate space between dances. Percy insisted that his patrons must be allowed comfortable and leisurely time in which to drink as much as they could pay for. Dancing did not fill Shadwell's cash register!

From time to time he inclined his head graciously towards a passing couple. Percy could bend his head with real effect, and had practised his smile before the mirror for hours. People so honoured walked away thinking that life was indeed well worth living. They even raised their glasses at times and bent a head towards the great Shadwell.

He was in the middle of a pleasant reverie when the waiter arrived at his side once again. The man seemed

a trifle distraught as he said :

"The caller, sir, is most persistent. I gave him your message, and he informed me that he cannot keep the suggested appointment for the morning. It seems, sir, that he is most anxious to meet you now."

Percy clicked his fingers irritably. For months he had been the monarch of all he surveyed. This sudden change peeved him. He brushed the waiter to one side,

and announced with some show of pomposity:

"I will see this man, Henry. He must be taught that I make my own appointments. I cannot tolerate

interference from other people."

Shadwell strode along the edge of the floor. The smile on his face was almost like a mask. When he arrived in the waiting-room the visitor rose to his feet. Percy drew back his shoulders, expanded his chest, and gazed at the caller. He had a penetrating eye, and had reduced many people to less than the dust. Yet the visitor seemed in no way daunted. Shadwell examined him with care. There were not many facets of human nature unknown to Percy. The study of individuals had probably done more than anything else to build up his business.

He could find no fault with the visitor's clothes. Some Savile Row firm had achieved perfection with the evening dress, and the man wore it with elegance and confidence. He was young, not more than twenty-five, and his features were not hard to gaze upon. The fair hair was perhaps too wavy to be genuine, and the face was handsome almost to the point of effeminacy, but this was offset by a slim, athletic figure. He smiled to display impeccable teeth, and stretched out his hand. Shadwell took it with a slight show of reluctance. Percy was watching his step. This man looked very much like money. That always meant a lot to Shadwell.

"Step into my office for a moment, please," he said. He was thawing. As soon as the man was seated and

the door was closed, Shadwell announced:

"I expect you have called here as a prospective member of my club? I am sorry to tell you that I have already a most considerable waiting list. If you would care to leave your name and address, together with the names of two members, or of two people known to me, I will see that your name is placed on the list. Should your recommendations be considered suitable, I would communicate with you when a vacancy arose."

The young man smiled brightly, and shook his head as he replied: "For once in your successful life you are wrong, Mr. Shadwell. I have not called here for that purpose. I am here to talk over a small matter of business with you. You do not object to me smoking, Mr. Shadwell?"

The club proprietor rose to his feet. The man's brief statement had changed the position entirely. Percy sounded austere as he remarked:

"I have no time now. I never discuss business while my members are in the club. My time is otherwise occupied. I am here to discuss business each day from eleven until twelve in the morning. If the matter really is important, I could see you then. If it is not important you will find that I am no waster of time. See my secretary in the morning, give her a brief statement as to your business, and I may decide to see you."

He waved a hand in the air as he ceased speaking. It

seemed final.

"My business will not wait until the morning," said the young man. "I know, of course, that you are a busy man. So am I. Please sit down again, and I will tell you exactly why I have made this call. At the end of a few minutes I don't think you will find that I am wasting your time."

"My rules are adamant," insisted Shadwell. "I will not talk business at such a time, to you or to any one

else. Now I must ask you to leave."

"Dear me," drawled the caller. "I had no idea that you would start by making matters more difficult than they are. It seems to me now-"

"It seems to me," interrupted Shadwell, "that you are outstaying your visit. Now I must return to my

patrons. Please don't annoy me further."

"Sit down," said the caller. Shadwell was shocked. He thought he had misheard. It could not be possible that any human being could speak to him in such a way in his own club. Oddly enough, he sat down.

"Now we can talk in comfort for a few minutes," remarked the visitor. He was quite unruffled as he proceeded to say: "The name doesn't matter a lot, but mine happens to be Robert Angel. Perhaps you will remember that. I have called at your club to save you from an amount of real annoyance, embarrassment and unpleasantness. Surely that means something?"

"This club does not suffer from any of those complaints, and while I am in charge it never will. If you move around in West End circles at all you will be well aware of the reputation we hold. That reputa-tion will be maintained. Nothing can be done that will

shake it."

"I call that a piece of wishful thinking, Mr. Shadwell. I happen to know that your most enviable reputation is likely to receive something more drastic than a mere shaking. That is why I have made this

call upon you." "I never could tolerate absurd talk, Mr. Angel. Since the day I opened this club there has been no trouble of any kind. I have adopted every conceivable form of safeguard against it. I assure you, Mr. Angel, that any information you may have is quite erroneous. Now

you may leave."

"Not just yet. I admire a man with confidence, Mr. Shadwell. But I always feel sorry when I meet a man with a fund of misplaced confidence. I give you my assurance that the information handed to me was accurate. Unless you hear what I have to say the Castor Club is going to walk into real trouble in large quantities. Such a warning should concern you deeply."

easy confidence. For an instant Shadwell was shaken. His caller talked with such a show of conviction that the proprietor was rattled. He loosened his collar.

"I have been sent to interview you on behalf of another party," said Robert Angel. "He knows better than any other person the trouble likely to fall upon you. He is most anxious to see that any such trouble should be averted. He has even sent me here to tell you that any trouble can be averted. But he is the only man in London who can ensure for you that your club continues its existence profitably and peacefully."

"No man in Lendon can tell me how to conduct my own club," thundered Shadwell, "and I resent your

statement as a piece of rank insolence."

"Don't lose your temper, Mr. Shadwell. After all, you have quite a name as an exponent of diplomacy. We will return to what I was saying. My principal assures me that he can guarantee you all the protection you require. Naturally, he is not likely to afford such services for nothing. That is really why he sent me along to talk terms with you."

"Talk terms? What terms? This sounds to me un-

commonly like blackmail."

"An ugly word, Mr. Shadwell, a most ugly word. I am sure that my friend would very much resent the use of such a word. Blackmail, indeed! He would be most annoyed. He gave me the impression that I might had you somewhat intolerant. He has proved to be right. Am I to take the message back to him that you envisage no trouble, that you are well able to look after the club without his assistance? Is that the message?"

"It is. And I've also got a message for you. If you call here again I will send for the police. They know only too well how to handle men of your type. You can be imprisoned for what you are attempting to do."

"Very well, Mr. Shadwell. I will return with your message, and I have no doubt that very shortly you will be seeing me again. When next I call it will be to see you about the sale of some champagne. If you don't require the champagne, we may have a talk about the protection offered to you so generously by my principal.

It may so happen, that by the time we next meet you will be changing your mind about quite a number of things. It may even have happened by then that you will believe that trouble can occur at times even in the Castor Club. I won't leave my address. As I told you, I will be returning. If you send for the police while I am with you it will mean the end of the Castor Club. I am in a position to ensure that within a very short time there is no club left here. If you want to wreck your life's work, start being awkward, and see where you arrive. I won't detain you any further. My love to your guests, and I trust they will have a happy time while they have the chance. That chance will last for a short time. After that it will depend entirely upon you. Remember, you have been warned. I bid you a fond Adieu."

Robert Angel stepped briskly towards the door, and passed out of the room. The man he left behind was running his hand around his perspiring face. Then he walked into the club and ordered a liqueur. Some of his famous debonair front had vanished. Percy Shadwell was a worried man. It was an hour before

he managed to return to normalcy. . . .

It was shortly after midnight three days later, when the magnificently uninformed commissionaire standing outside the Castor Club glanced along the pavement and sniffed disdainfully. Three men were stumbling towards him, singing somewhat ribaldly. The commissionaire hated such scenes, particularly when they were staged near the august premises of the Castor Club. Of course, at times the members of the club were capable of becoming expensively drunk, but in their case it was very different. Why, such gentlemen had they proved to be that often he had been given ten shillings for carrying one of them across the pavement and loading him into a taxi. The three men staggering towards him were not of that stamp. They were not gentlemen. They couldn't be. They did not wear evening dress, and they were even singing. He shook his head mournfully.

They drew abreast of the commissionaire. stepped back a little, and sniffed audibly. One of the men cursed as he lost his balance, lurched towards the immaculate figure in uniform. The commissionaire held out a restraining hand. He didn't want the drunken man to touch his uniform. The man did not touch the uniform. But if he had spat on the ornate equipment the doorman would have known nothing about it. The "drunk" straightened up, lashed out with a blackjack, and struck the doorman at the side of the temple. He folded up, and laid his uniform on the soiled pavement. The "drunks" suddenly became sober. They seized the burly body of the commissionaire, and threw him head first into the entrance porch.

Then they stepped over the still body to push back the swing doors of the club. They delved into their overcoat pockets, and each man pulled out two large glass flasks. These they flung high into the air so that they fell on the dance floor with a crash, and smashed. The three men did not wait to watch for results. Before anybody in the club realised what had happened, the men had bundled into the waiting car at the corner of the road. Their job had been well and truly done.

Ten minutes later Percy Shadwell and his waiters were alone in the Castor Club. Even the dance band had beat a hectic retreat. The hundred and fifty patrons had fled in a state of panic. The glass flasks had contained sulphuretted hydrogen, and genteel nostrils

could not stand the strain.

All the windows were flung open. It was almost three hours before the heavy odour of bad eggs began to seep out of the premises. The club was closed down for the night. The episode cost Percy rather more than two hundred pounds. He wanted to sit down and

weep copiously.

Shadwell telephoned for the police. They were sympathetic without being helpful. They suggested that it was a mad prank. Perhaps a few undergrads had been out on a spree. It might even have been done by a few people whom he had barred from the club. They might even have been thrown by men who had been refused membership. It was all very sad, they said, and an investigation would most certainly be made.

Percy noticed sorrowfully that on the following night the attendance was rather sparse. Bad news travels quickly—almost as quickly as the bad smell of sulphuretted hydrogen! The visitors of the previous night had been talking—plenty. Shadwell wore a worried smile. Already, he decided that he was a fool. He should have told the police about his strange caller. Maybe they would have agreed then that the episode was no foolish prank. Unfortunately, he had remained silent. He thought he might do more harm than good by talking. If the police started using the place, started making inquiries among his select patrons, it might give the Castor Club a bad name. Still, he wished he had mentioned it.

He wondered very much when the mysterious Robert Angel would put in another appearance. He had expected him on the morning following the outrage with the glass flasks. But four days passed and Robert Angel did not appear. The patrons began to drift back. They had decided that the unhappy business was probably a drunken revel. They didn't in the least appreciate it, but such accidents happened at times during their "smart" lives. The club, thought Shadwell, would soon get back into its full stride. He even started to smile again with his old-time brilliance.

It was shortly after three o'clock on the Friday night—Saturday morning would be more accurate—when a lady departed from her escort in the club, and retired to the ladies' room. A few seconds later the hundred patrons were staggered to hear a piercing shriek, and patrons were staggered to hear a piercing shriek, and then another horrified yell. The waiters hesitated. So did Percy Shadwell. The call, beyond any doubt, emanated from the ladies' room. A guest bravely voluntated from the ladies' room. A guest bravely voluntated to investigate. She walked into the room with her head well thrown back and her shoulders braced. The patrons gazed at her with no mean show of admiration. Unfortunately, a few seconds later she also commenced to scream. Her bravado had given way to hysteria.

Percy Shadwell decided that he could wait no longer. Followed by a couple of waiters, he dashed into the ladies' room. One of his patrons lay on the floor in

a faint. The other was crouched against the wall, screaming hysterically. The cause was plainly apparent. The woman in charge of the cloakroom was stretched out on the floor. There was some blood on the carpet at the side of her head. Shadwell saw the wide-open window at the far end of the room, and cursed volubly. He glanced quickly round the room. Then he breathed again. Everything looked normal. There was no sulphuretted hydrogen about the place. Two more waiters arrived. He ordered brandy for his patrons, and told a couple of waiters to stay with the cloakroom attendant until she recovered. He even suggested that they should try rubbing her face and neck with ice.

There was no doubt that the woman had received a violent blow on the back of the head. The wound was ugly. Percy thought that perhaps, after all, he could risk the reputation of the club to the extent of ringing for a doctor. He did not want anything serious to happen to the woman while she was in the Castor After he had made the call he Club's cloakroom. returned to the room.

The scene had changed considerably. Now a score of lamenting women were bleating about the place. Shadwell's heart performed quite a few acrobatics. He feared that there had been a wholesale robbery, and started wondering why the place had appeared untouched.

It was not long before he discovered that his guess was very far wide of the mark. There had been no robbery. The calamity was much worse than that. Weeping women clustered round him holding out their fur coats tenderly. It was some little time before the dazed Percy appreciated the cause of all the sorrow. Twenty women were trying to inform him at the same time, and the place was a regular bedlam.

The unknown visitor had performed a neat job of work. Shadwell was too stunned to be fast on the uptake, but finally he realised what had happened.

Some twenty or thirty fur coats and fur wraps had

been most liberally treated with nitric acid!

Shadwell tottered away from the weeping women,

and helped himself to a large cognac. It wasn't easy to

hold the glass in his quivering hand.

Percy shivered. He wondered whether he was responsible for the safe custody of the coats and wraps. He knew the women and he knew the furs, and the thought brought him no happiness. The coats and wraps were no moleskins from the remnant basements, no faded antelopes from the rigged-in sales of the East End specialists. His patrons would never strut the West End arena in such rubbish. Their stuff was good, so good that Percy Shadwell groaned a little, and poured out another stiff drink.

Automatically he telephoned the police, and then he returned nervously to the cloakroom. The women hovered around him like carrion crows. Their laments increased as they realised more and more that their furs were hopelessly ruined. Nitric acid may be colourless, but it has no mean bite. Percy was hearing plenty about the cost of the various items when the police arrived. The Divisional Detective Inspector viewed the scene with some dismay. He drew the distraught Shad-

well to one side, said to him :

"It isn't so long ago since all your members were driven out of this place with a cargo of sulphuretted hydrogen. And now this has happened. Have you been upsetting anybody, Mr. Shadwell? I can't believe for a moment that there is no connection between the two events. If any person developed a personal grudge against you, and they wanted to put you out of business, I reckon they couldn't go about the job more efficiently than by staging these two performances. I'll tell you what I've got in my mind. The business with the gas didn't show one penny profit. And the destruction of these furs doesn't bring any grist to the mill. two jobs can only have been done to wreck your club. Now use your head, and let me know some of the people who hate you so much that they might have done it. I want to get to the bottom of this business before we are landed with a third outrage. Well, what help can you give me, Mr. Shadwell?"

The man shook his head miserably. If he told the truth it would mean a full-scale police inquiry, the

constant attendance of detectives at the club, and a nightly police surveillance. That would mean absolute suicide. People—particularly people like his members would never use any club in which the police were so keenly interested. He thought long and furiously. The man sounded quite pathetic as he said at last:

"I'll have to discuss the position with my lawyer, and then I'll let you know. I wouldn't like to make any move until I've received a few words of advice from him. If you will make a few inquiries now, and then leave the matter until later in the morning, I will get into touch with you. Candidly, my head isn't work-

ing any too clearly at the moment."

'That isn't altogether surprising, Mr. Shadwell. You are having a very worrying time. I must warn you, however, that by postponing your decision you are only making things very much more difficult for the police."

Percy agreed miserably that he would have to risk that. He telephoned his lawyer, roused the man from bed, and insisted that he should visit the club at once. The solicitor was not easily persuaded. Finally, he agreed to call. The women collected their ruined coats and wraps, and vacated the club after telling Percy Shadwell plenty about the value of their articles, and the compensation they would insist upon getting from him. The doctor ordered the cloakroom attendant to be taken to hospital. The waiters offered their condolences, and departed.

Shadwell was left alone in the club. He paced miserably around the forsaken premises until the lawyer arrived. Immediately he told him what had happened, and took his adviser along to the cloakroom. The solicitor listened to the tale of woe, and did nothing

to dissipate Percy's gloom.

"It looks to me," he declared, "as though you'll have to pay up with a smile. Of course, many of the furs will be insured, but even then I expect the insurance will fall back on you when the claims are made. You were so certain that nothing could go wrong in the Castor Club that you even overlooked one of the most elementary precautions. You didn't exhibit the usual notices saying that you would not accept responsibility for articles left in the cloakrooms. That leaves you in

the mire, Mr. Shadwell."

Percy was too depressed to continue the discussion. He informed his solicitor that he would call upon him later in the day, and discuss the position fully. hinted that there were matters connected with the two outrages about which he most grievously required advice. The lawyer took a drink and a cigar, offered his condolences, and vanished. Shadwell locked up the club, and spent the remainder of the night trying to sleep on a couch in the dance room. He had to get drunk before he succeeded!

He was a white-faced and chastened man eight or nine hours later as he sat in his office. Outside he could hear the cleaners working in the club. Percy had already taken a couple of brandies when his secretary paced into the room, frowned when she saw the

drink on the desk, said:

"There is a gentleman waiting to see you, sir. He says that you know him quite well, and he gives the name of Robert Angel."

"Show him in," said Percy listlessly He poured out

another drink.

# CHAPTER TEN

### REACHING UPWARDS

ROBERT ANGEL bounced into the office with a radiant smile, a big "Hallo!" and an outstretched hand. Shadwell ignored the hand, and grimaced when he saw the smile. Angel stared at the trembling hand holding the glass, remarked easily as he lounged down in a chair: "Been hitting the high spots, haven't you, Mr. Shadwell? I seem to miss that film star smile and schoolboy complexion. A bad thing, you know, to dive into brandy at this time in the morning. Shakes the nerves, and all that sort of thing. I thought the moment had arrived when I might talk over a little business with you. Or won't your head stand up to it?" F.

"Angel," said Percy rather thickly, "why did you have to make the two attempts to bust my business? I've done you no harm, have I?"

"Me attempt to bust your club? Don't make me laugh, Mr. Shadwell. That must be the brandy talking. You should lay off the stuff for a while until you start thinking normally again. Really, you do come out with the most amazing statements. At moments you astonish me. Take a smoke, and see whether that will steady your nerves. My oath, they need a little help."
"You know damned well," muttered Shadwell, "that

you gassed all the people out of this place, and then you ruined all their fur coats. I'm asking you—what have I done to upset you? I don't know you at all."

"My dear Mr. Shadwell, I fear that your memory is passing out on you. I paid you a visit, and informed you of certain information in my private possession. I said there was going to be plenty of trouble at the Castor Club. You did not believe me. Now I think you will agree that when I paid that visit here I really did know what I was talking about. If you had accepted my advice-as any sensible man would have donethere is a chance that all the trouble would have been averted. It may still not be too late to make some kind of reasonable adjustment."

" And just what do you call a reasonable adjustment?

Tell me that."

"I will. I have discussed this matter with my principal. He feels very sorry for you indeed. Immediately he heard that trouble might start he asked me to meet you. You know the result of our meeting. You, instead of being grateful, were most rude and insolent. I assure you, Mr. Shadwell, that my principal felt most hurt. For a time he was so indignant that he said he would leave you alone with all your troubles. I argued against that, insisted that it would not be fair for him to sit back, and watch your promising business being completely wrecked. Believe me, it took me a most considerable time before I could persuade him to change his mind. Finally he said that he would swallow your insults because he did not wish to see you go entirely against the wall. I thought it was a most sporting

gesture on his part, and I promised him that I would meet you just once again. My principal, Mr. Shadwell, is quite sure that he could guarantee continued peace

and happiness in your splendid club."

"He having caused all the trouble I have had so far," said Shadwell bitterly. "Your principal-if you have got one—is playing a very dangerous game. I'm not certain, Angel, that you haven't fixed all this business yourself. Men go to gaol for committing crimes like these."

"There you go again! Will nothing cure your insolent habits? All we know about your troubles is that we can bring them to an end. We have a powerful organisation behind us. We can pull strings, and we know our way around. If peace means anything to you, we can give you the protection you require. The people troubling you dare not make any further attempt if they once knew that my principal has taken a personal interest."

"I'll bet they wouldn't! Who is this almighty prin-

cipal of yours?"

"He would prefer to remain anonymous, Mr. Shadwell. Really, he is a most retiring man. That is why he conducts all his business through me. But I, of course, merely act as an agent on his behalf. Well, do you want to hear the terms upon which we will cover you with full protection, or not?"

"I may as well hear them," said Shadwell miserably. He started to pour out another drink. It quite surprised him when Robert Angel laid a hand on his wrist, and

remarked sternly: "I don't do business with any man when he is half drunk. Such people are apt to have cloudy memories. They sometimes even make the mistake of forgetting the terms agreed upon. I would prefer that you left that stuff alone until we have finished our brief talk. After that, you can drink whatever you like when you like."

"Now you are starting to order me about in my own club! I've stood for a lot, Angel, but I'm not standing

for that line of talk." "Then sit for it!" snapped the caller. "It all means the same to me. I want to talk to you while you're capable of talking sense. Lay off the stuff, and listen to me. Maybe your mishaps of recent days have cost you a lot of trade, and it might result that they cost you a pile of money. But once the old conditions reign in the Castor Club again you will soon recover the trade, and the money will pour in. Very soon all the recent unhappy events will be forgotten by your members. It may even happen that the slight notoriety you have gained will turn out to be quite beneficial. We, on our part, will do our utmost to see that your trade comes back to you. We will see that once it has come back it stays with you. Now, what do we want in return for such valuable services?

"An organisation such as ours costs a lot of money to conduct. We give value for money, but our expenses have to be covered. We may even require a small profit apart from our expenditure. After all, very few men care to work for nothing, Mr. Shadwell. My principal has taken such an intense interest in the affairs of the

Castor Club that he has been able to form a rough idea of your takings. The approximate figures so impressed him that he is most anxious to secure your future welfare. He thought you were taking on an average about two thousand pounds a week. Knowing the prices you charge, he believed that your profit ratio would be abnormally high. He put the gross profit at eight hundred pounds a week. But he is a wise man, and a fair man, and he also appreciated that your expenses must be high. You pay your small and admirable band a hundred a week. Forgive me if I say that the money is well spent. Your rent, we believe, is six thousand a year—a hundred and twenty a week. We

know how generous you are with your lights. We have allowed you thirty pounds a week for lighting and heating. Your waiters receive no pay. In fact, you draw money from them for the pleasure of working here. That leaves the cleaners and the doorman. A

mere triviality. Say twenty a week.

"So what have we Mr. Shadwell? My arithmetic has never been considered bright. You must check my designs. My principal has made a very rough calculation. He reckons that you are making a net profit well in excess of five hundred pounds a week. It is a lot of money, Mr. Shadwell-a lot of money if you lose the lot, and that is what will happen the way things are going. Now let us take a glance at the entire picture.

"You are making five hundred, and you stand a very good chance of losing the lot. We can ensure that this club continues to thrive, and we can see that your income is maintained at an ample level. What is such protection worth to you? Think it over just for

a few minutes.

"But before you start to consider the matter, let me give you our concrete offer: We will safeguard the Castor Club against trouble in any and every form for a weekly payment to me of two hundred pounds!"

Percy Shadwell drew in a deep breath. The veins at the sides of his temple were throbbing. Robert Ange! drew a cigarette from a handsome gold case, and tilted

his chair back a little as he added casually :

"We could, of course, have asked for half the net profits, but we felt that since you run the club you should receive rather more than a half."

"Ask for a half?" inquired Shadwell hoarsely. He stretched out a hand for his glass, and this time the caller made no move to stop him. Maybe he felt that Shadwell was needing a drink pretty badly!

"If I paid you two hundred pounds a week there would be nothing left for me," he said. "You've got your figures all wrong. It is a mad idea."

"My principal foresaw that you might raise some slight objection. So he provided me with an alternative proposal. He imagined that you would question his figures, Mr. Shadwell. Therefore he wishes me to demonstrate to you how fairly he wishes to treat you. He says that if you reject his figures, and you decline his first offer, he is quite content to accept ten per cent of your total takings. Naturally, that would involve one of our men being employed here in order to ensure that there should be no mistakes. Well, Mr. Shadwell, you can accept either offer. The choice rests with you,

and I feel that really you are being treated

considerately."

"Treated considerately?" repeated Shadwell hollowly. "If I accept those terms either way, it will only mean that I am forced out of business."

Robert Angel bent forward, tapped the desk with his

finger, and said:

"Mr. Shadwell, if the troubles continue at the Castor Club it means that you will be forced out of business in any event. Why don't you try to view the whole affair in the right perspective? If you refuse our offer you end up by losing all you have got. If you accept you lose only a proportion of your massive income. And all worries and anxieties are removed from your mind. Candidly, were I in your place, I would not for a moment hesitate about the set-up. I would grab the chance offered me with a feeling of some gratitude. Well, there isn't anything further I can tell you. If any point seems obscure to you, perhaps you'll let me know what it is, and I will do my humble best to enlighten you a little."

"Then tell me this: What guarantee have I got that there would be no further trouble? At the moment I have only your word, and I am not at all disposed to

accept that. I can see no reason why I should."
"Don't strain the point, Mr. Shadwell. No party in the West End dare start trouble once they know that our organisation is protecting you."

"You mean that you would cause me no further

trouble yourselves ? "

"How stupidly you phrase things! I meant exactly what I said. Perhaps I ought to add one further comment. If trouble does arise after you have accepted our offer, I am certain you would discover that the trouble arose solely as a consequence of your own actions. Am I quite clear?"

"If I did not pay you would start the ball rolling

all over again?"

"I am not here to bandy words with you. Can 1

have your answer now?"

"Definitely, no. The matter is so important to me that I am not going to decide immediately. Two hundred pounds a week is a terrible lot of money for me-or for anybody else-to part with. I want time in which to consider what you have said. Surely you don't begrudge me that?"

"We do not. My principal—as you will find—is not an uareasonable man. I will tell him that you are

giving the matter earnest thought."

"All right. There's one other matter. If I accept your offer, how do I know that you won't start reaching upwards? Once you have made a start I have no guarantee that you won't be increasing your terms, have I?"

"The man for whom I act would never go back once he has promised. You talk in an odd manner about reaching upwards. I think this is the right and proper moment for me to use the same words in another connection, and with a very different meaning. If you entered into a bargain with us, and we found that you were crossing us, that you were faking figures, that you were striving to squirm out of the agreement by reducing the amount payable, you would be the party to start reaching upwards!"

"I think I follow your meaning," said Percy Shad-well. He felt like a man sinking for the third time. "All right, I'll be seeing you again. Do you want the answer by any particular time, or can I please myself?" "We feel that we have already given you quite an amount of latitude. I will call here at the same time

in the morning. That suit you?" "I suppose it will have to suit me. It looks as though in future I can't call my life my own. I'd rather

be dead than live like this."

"Your death, Mr. Shadwell, is a matter readily capable of arrangement. I will bid you good-morning. I trust that you will arrive at a wise and profitable decision. Lay off the brandy until you have worked out the answer. If you row in with us you'll need a very clear brain."

A quarter of an hour later Percy Shadwell slumped down in a chair in his solicitor's office. The man looked worn and haggard. The sudden shock, a sleepless night, and too much brandy had played merry hell with him.

He talked for nearly an hour. The lawyer drew hundreds of funny men on his blotting pad, and said very little. His eventual verdict was brief :

"This is essentially a case for the police. You'd better come along with me, and tell them exactly what you've been saying to me. The men behind this racket

can easily get five years apiece, probably more."

"But that's what I don't want to do. I know plenty about high-class clubs, and you don't. Once the police start swarming around the Castor Club I might just as well close down. The members would run like hell if they even suspected what was happening. I can assure you that once a police investigation started in full blast I might just as well pull down the shutters. Look at some of my members-stock-brokers, doctors, solicitors, Army, Navy and Air Force officers, senior Civil Servants, and the sons and daughters of some of the most famous families in the country. Could you believe for a moment that they would continue to patronise the club? You know perfectly well that they would fly out of the place as though bubonic plague or some-thing had settled on it."

"If you refuse to pass information to the police, your only chance is to pay the two hundred and hope for the best. But I most emphatically advise you against it. It would be a never-ending piece of blackmail."

"Surely there must be some other chance. You are a knowledgeable man, and you know the world. Is

there no way out of this tangle for me ?"

The solicitor was silent for an appreciable time. Shadwell watched his face hopefully. The lawyer

shrugged his shoulders when he remarked:

"There is one blind gamble, if you would care to take it. I've heard a whole volume about a private detective named Mick Cardby. His offices are in Henrietta Street. I'm told that he is hell on wheels. Why not make him a member of your club, and see what he can do? You're in such a fix that you wouldn't have much to lose. It is purely a suggestion on my part, but I can think of no other way out for you, Mr. Shackell."

"I've lost so much that I can afford to take a few

chances. Give me his address, and I'll get along to his offices right away. If he could perform the miracle I'd gladly give him a thousand pounds."

"He might even ask for more. I've heard a lot about

that young man!"

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### MOVING INTO ACTION

MICK CARDBY passed very few comments, asked very few questions, as Percy Shadwell ploughed once again through his unhappy story.

"And that is all I can tell you," concluded Shadwell. "If you can help me at all I am prepared to pay you well. What do you say about it?"

"The men working the racket on you must be a dangerous bunch. I hope you realise that by employing me you are taking a considerable risk. If they discovered that you had employed me the consequences for you might easily be most unfortunate. I am not trying to scare you, Mr. Shadwell, but I think it is only right that I should point out the real danger to you. Risks mean very little in my small life. I was weaned on them. But they mean a lot in the life of a man who isn't used to taking them."

"You think they might injure me for engaging you

on the case ?"

"I think that 'injure' is too trivial a word to use. I was trying to indicate that they might decide to remove you from the scene altogether. That is an angle of the case on which I would not care to give advice. I merely point out the danger, and leave you to decide whether or not you are prepared to take the risk.

Think it over for a few moments."

The men stared at each other without speaking.

Percy said eventually:

"I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, Mr. Cardby. I can see now that they would finish by owning my club in any case, so there's not much for me to lose. The Castor Club is my life. If they take the club they can have my life with it. I shan't be wanting it any more. I am quite prepared to take the risk if

you will undertake the case."

"All right, Mr. Shadwell. I accept the case. My terms will not be too onerous. I want a hundred guineas a week while I investigate the case. I want a thousand guineas if I crack it wide open, and leave you with a business you can run in peace. That may sound a lot of money, but it is a fleabite compared with the sum you'd have to hand over to the mob over a period of months. Are those terms acceptable to you, Mr. Shadwell?"

"If you could lift this load from my shoulders, I'd reckon I'd got a first-class bargain at that price. I'm

only too ready to agree."

"In that case we can cut the cackle, and get down to the hosses. I've listened carefully to all you've said, and I can assure you that I've encountered the same racket on many occasions before. I've even broken a few of them. But they require very, very careful handling, Mr. Shadwell. The main difficulty is to discover the nigger in the woodpile, the man on the top of the racket. You can leave that part of it to me. In fact, I require no advice or interference from you whatever. If I want any information, I will ask for it. Apart from that, I want you to leave this office, do a small job, and then forget that I've ever existed.

"Your next move is very simple. I am going to be a member of the Castor Club. Make out the card with my real name on it. I'm too well known to risk a faked monica. At the same time make one out for Miss Constance Wheeler. I will give you her address, and mine. But now I come to the important matter. When you make out those cards be sure that you antedate them. If you register both of us joining the club about six months ago that will suit well. Send those round to my private address by a messenger you can trust. If you let me have the girl's card I'll see that she gets it. You won't make any mistake about that job?"

"No. I'll see that they are sent round to your house

right away."

"That's good. There isn't much else I wish to say.
Treat me at the club exactly as you would any other member. If you displayed any partiality towards me it would wreck the whole party. I want no free drinks, and no free meals. Let me have my chit in the ordinary way, and I'll pay my bills out of the hundred guineas. That was partly why I fixed a high price. If anything suspicious does arise, be careful how you pass the news along to me. Perhaps the best way would be for you to write it down on the back of my bill. And each time I'll make a point of examining the back of the chit. There is only one point remaining.

"When the man you know as Robert Angel makes his call tomorrow morning look as melancholy as you like, and tell him that he has placed you on such a spot that you can't get out of paying. Give him the first two hundred quid as evidence of good faith, and tell him in so many words that in the future you will toe the line, and act like a perfect little gentleman, That's all, except that I don't want you to come to this office any more. Here's my private address and my telephone number. Now, I'll wish you good-bye, and

all the best of luck. Send the cards along."

"It should be me wishing you the best of luck," said

"Perhaps so. I reckon I'll be needing my share of Percy Shadwell. it before I am through with the party. Watch your

step, and don't make silly mistakes." Percy felt better when he left the offices of Cardby and Son. Maybe he found that Mick Cardby could exude confidence at moments. The man had not long left the office when the detective walked through to Constance Wheeler's room. He patted the secretary on the shoulder, said flippantly:

"Beautiful, you're diving into glad-rags tonight. I'm taking you to a party. Don't you think I'm the swellest young man about this town?"

"No, I don't. And what party are you talking about, in any case? Mother brought me up to possess a sense of respectability, and somehow I don't imagine that your type of party would be exactly my handwriting."

"Sheer ingratitude! This is a swagger affair, Angelic. For the next few nights-if I live !-- I've got to keep an eye on the Castor Club. You must have heard of that joint. The trouble is that I dare not take a solo trip to a place like that. It would make the whole layout look screwy immediately. So it is necessary for me to escort a beautiful lady. What a piece of luck for me that the search starts and finishes in my own offices! All you do is quite simple. You slide into your best bib and tucker, eat a meal as though you're hungry, drink enough to make you cheerful company without rendering you entirely drunk, and then stagger from the table at odd moments to trample on my feet all round the dance floor. Why, that's the sort of treat many girls dream about, think about, and read about. For you, Precious, the dream is about to become a gorgeous reality. That lucky star must be keeping a pretty close eye on you."

"You're not sprucing, Mr. Cardby? This is a

straight business job?"

"Absolutely. But, for the love of Mike, don't start calling me 'Mr. Cardby.' That wouldn't sound quite right in that atmosphere. My mother has called me 'Mick' for years. I offer you the same doubtful pleasure."

"Since it is business, I reckon I'll have to accept. At what time do you wish to meet me? Remember that

I don't stay the course on long hours."

"You can close down your office, and get along home now. Get between the sheets, and grab what sleep you can during this afternoon, and the early evening. I will call for you at the house around eleven o'clock."

"Lordy, if you don't start until then, when on earth

do you finish?"

"That is in the lap of the gods. Probably we'll drift out of the dump between three and four in the morning. Don't look startled. It'll give you a chance to watch the upper strata at May. Is it all set clear?"

"I'm still a bit dazed. I'll be waiting for you at

eleven, Mick."

"Thanks or remembering the name. You really said it quite pre' ily."

Mick found the membership cards awaiting him at home. He, too, retired to bed shortly before five o'clock, leaving a request that his shoulder should be nudged at about nine thirty. When they arrived at the Castor Club Constance Wheeler was disappointed. She had fully expected to be whirled into a gay party. She was not. Only about thirty people were present, and they did not altogether look like little rays of sunshine. Constance did not know that most of the girls present had only returned to the club to continue their

arguments concerning their ruined furs.

By one o'clock in the morning time was beginning to drag. Even the superlatively good food, the vintage drinks, and excellent dance floor couldn't disperse the general air of gloom about the place. At odd times Percy Shadwell hovered about among the people. smile was a pale shadow of an earlier triumph. The man looked ill. Mick noticed that he was raising his elbow frequently, but not wisely. Cardby danced and drank until he became bored. The conversation was becoming desultory. Constance Wheeler knew the symptoms only too well. Idleness was not made for Mick Cardby. Inactivity depressed him. His spirits soared when action flared around him. His depression began to affect his companion. She said:

"Do you sit around like a family mourner every time you take a girl out for the evening, Mick? What a big

thrill for all your lady friends!"

"They get used to it after a while, Constance. What

about a dance ?"

The place was filling up a little more. But it was certainly not the Castor Club of old. People were speaking in whispers, and a melancholic crooner did nothing to enliven the entertainment. The women were staring at poor Percy with unfriendly eyes. And the more they stared the more miserable he bocome. He found it hard not to gaze towards Mick Cardby in the hope of collecting at least one sympathetic glance.

Mick and Constance sinped some more champagne. They had only been consuming enough to put up a front. Beer was Cardby's pastime in any event. The cabaret show came and went. It added a little cheer to the party. And a few more people drifted in. Without being told anything about the recent troubles, Cardby would have known from the atmosphere that something in the club was badly wrong. Any person could have sensed it.

Constance Wheeler was having difficulty in stifling a succession of yawns. Mick followed suit. The habit can be most infectious! They danced again—mostly because they thought they might fall asleep if they did not move about from time to time. Cardby was not Constance Boredom was wearing him down.

sounded quite pathetic when she whispered:

"My God, Mick, do you mean that we've got to repeat this performance a few more times? I don't

think I can stand this place for much longer."

"I want to come here until the people know me," he said. "Don't get the thought into your head that we are sitting here for nothing, Constance. any moment the top might start to blow off this place. The Castor Club in these days is not what it looks. merely warning you." I'm

"In that case I'd gladly kiss the man who started the fun and games. I can remember the day when

you'd have started something yourself." "So can I, and that's exactly what I'd like to do now. But not tonight. I'm here on a job, and I don't fool about when I'm working, Constance."
"I've noticed that," she remarked mournfully. "I

wish this was play."

Several people stared at them. Cardby wished they would look elsewhere. It was not convenient that he should attract attention as a stranger. He was almost despairing when a small piece of information brought a new interest into his life. Mick had forsaken Con stance for a moment, and retired to the men's cloakroom. He was brushing his hair when he discovered that he shared the mirror with Percy Shadwell. No other person was in the room. Shadwell did not look at him as he whispered:

"Five minutes ago a man and a girl came in, and sat in the corner near the band platform. The girl is

dressed in a pale blue dress. See them?"

"I can't say that I took particular notice of them. What about it?"

"Plenty. The man sitting with that girl is Robert Angel! He crashed into the place since he knows that I daren't order him out."

"Thanks for the information. I'll take a peep at the bloke sometime. Keep the ball rolling, and don't make any mistakes. I'll be getting back."

Mick started to dance. As they reached the corner he turned so that he faced the couple. His glimpse was momentary, but it taught him one significant thing. The man was watching him closely. Cardby had almost a photographic memory. And he was certain that he had seen the man before. They sat down, and he poured out more champagne. He wondered whether his memory was playing tricks. A recollection clicked in his mind, and he knew that he had made no mistake. Indirectly, he did know the man.

Cardby's memory careered back over a couple of years. There had been a young girl named Nina Everest. She had been a cute kid. For a time she cut quite a dash in the West End. The playboys used to hover around her in massed formation. And Nina knew how to take the boys for a ride. She made some useful money. Mick had watched her progress with considerable interest, waiting all the time for the girl to make the inevitable slip, and tumble to earth—or into gaol !-with a crash. But she knew her way around, and fixed the boys so neatly that they had no come-back.

And it was during the peak of her career that Nina Everest started to get around with the man known as Robert Angel. Cardby could place him well enough now. For a time he thought that the pair of them were busy working the ancient "badger" game. He never discovered whether his guess was right. But in those days he saw them about in plenty of places. Mick was not altogether grateful for the information raked up from his memory. Nina knew Mick well. That made it almost positive that she would have put the finger on him, would have told all she knew to Robert Angel. No, the thought was none too happy. He danced once

again.

While they circled the floor he was striving to recall the remainder of Nina's career. The girl had vanished from the West End. Now, what was the story connected with her disappearance? Cardby wondered whether the champagne had slowed down his mental processes. But they had not been seated at their table again for many seconds when the memory functioned. Nina had worked the oracle on an elderly and wealthy stockbroker. The man had married her. The affair caused quite a sensation at the time. He was still endeavouring to recall the man's name when Constance Wheeler suggested yet another dance. Mick smiled gratefully. It was the least he could do. He noticed that Robert Angel and his companion very rarely moved from their seats. Yet both danced well.

Mick did not end the dance without a shock. He approached the platform, and was swinging round the corner when he felt a touch on the shoulder. He twisted round to find Robert Angel standing by his side!

"I'm sorry to butt in, Mr. Cardby," he said, smiling broadly, "but would you greatly object if we joined you at your table? It would, after all, make a small party

for the four of us, wouldn't it?"

"I can assure you that we would be most delighted," replied Mick. "I'm afraid that for the moment I cannot introduce you to my friend, since I don't know you from Adam. Such small items, however, are soon rectified."

They ceased dancing. The four of them crossed the

floor together.

# CHAPTER TWELVE

## BRAZEN CONVERSATION

CARDBY felt happy. At last something had happened. Even Constance was quick to observe the change. lethargy had vanished. One person in the room was very far from feeling jubilant. Percy Shadwell had watched the move, and a succession of cold shivers had coursed down his spine. He licked his lips, and ordered another drink. This brandy he took strictly for medicinal purposes. He couldn't stand the strain

The four were still standing when the introductions

"Sorry that you don't recall me," said Robert Angel. were effected. "I imagined that you saw me so often with Nina Everest that you would have placed me. The name is Robert Angel. My friend is Eva Cunliffe. Miss Cunliffe, meet the redoubtable Mick Cardby, the terror

of every criminal in London."

Mick introduced Constance Wheeler. He was still admiring Angel. The man had made his short statement without batting an eyelid. He certainly had what it needed in the way of nerves—or the absence of them. Robert raised his finger for a waiter. Champagne was

"How odd," said Angel, "that we should have met in this place, Mr. Cardby. I had no idea that you ever

used the Castor Club. Really, I hadn't."

"That doesn't surprise me in the least," said Cardby, smiling cordially. "The fact is that although I've been here scores of times I've never met you here. Have you noticed Mr. Angel at the club before, Constance?"

"Never, and I've got a good memory for faces. It seems odd that we have missed each other in such a

small place. But these things do happen."

"It is a funny world," remarked Angel. "I'm trying 97

to remember when I did last meet you, Mr. Cardby. I know it was a long time ago, wasn't it?"

"Ages ago. I believe I last saw you with Nina in

the old Dames' Club."

"That sounds more than likely, Mr. Cardby. Have you been a member here for long? We haven't, and

I can't say that I'm very enthusiastic."

"It certainly seems rather dead tonight. What a change from the nights when we used to have the real parties. You ask if I am an old member. I can't say that I'm an original member. I should guess that we joined up with the party five or six months ago. What would you say, Constance?"

"I can put more of a date on it for you," lied Constance unblushingly. "Our first visit was to the

big gala dance in Easter week."

"So now you know," commented Cardby, laughing,

as he picked up a drink.

"I wish we'd have met you before," said Robert Angel. "I hope you have forgiven us for gate-crashing into your party. The truth is that we were becoming terribly bored, and we wanted a change of scenery for a while."

"I don't mind in the least," said Constance. "Candidly I was starting to imagine that they'd be bringing corpses in at any moment. The place is something of a morgue tonight, isn't it? I can't understand it."

"I think I can explain that," asserted Mick, having decided to take the bull by the horns. "I've been told that lately there have been one or two very nasty 'incidents' here. Don't look nervous ladies, you've got a first-class escort. I suppose, Mr. Angel, that during your travels around this village you have heard about the spot of bother they've had here?"

"Just rumours, but I don't know what weight there

is behind them."

"I'm very sorre," declared Mick Cardby, "because Percy Shadwell had worked hard to build up this business, and he is a very decent chap. It seems damned bad luck when people start working on your club."

The two men were smiling towards each other. Angel hurried to say:

"Things like that never happen without some strong

underlying cause."

"I know that only too well," said Cardby. "At one time or another I've come across quite a lot of it. That's one of the trials and misfortunes of a detective's life. Mostly, the explanation is really quite simple."

"You do see life," commented Robert Angel. "What

is the explanation?"

The smile on Cardby's face appeared quite normal

as he answered:

"Mostly a lot of scum, just a collection of cheap blackguards, object to the owner of the club earning plenty of money in an honest way. They try to muscle-in on his property. That causes the trouble in most of the cases. It does seem a pity, but what can you do when you populate part of the West End with wastrels and hooligans who want everything and anything so long as they don't work, and they can live on crime?"

Robert Angel accepted the crack with composure. Maybe his face became a trifle more red, but the change was so slight that it would normally never have been noticed. He raised his glass, bowed towards the ladies, and then towards Cardby. Mick passed round

the cigarettes as he said:

"But who wants to talk about crime on an evening out? I didn't come here on a busman's holiday. Constance, let's wear this floor out some more. Perhaps

you will excuse us for a moment, will you?"

As they danced Mick grinned and chatted to Constance. He was trying in the shortest space of time to give her the lowdown on the position. She was no nitwit. The firm of Cardby and Son would never have employed a person who was slow on the uptake. By the time they resumed their seats she knew most of the answers. She refused another drink. Cardby poured out three more. For a time they discussed trivialities. But it was not long before Robert Angel swung the conversation back to the theme:

"Why don't you do something to help Percy Shadwell, Mr. Cardby, if he is in a fix? I couldn't think

of any person in town who could help him more than you could. After all, you're a member of some standing, and trouble in your own club must mean something

to you, mustn't it?"

"Of course it does. It means that if it gets any worse I find another club. I have trouble enough in my life without looking for it among my pleasures. Besides, I don't work for nothing, and I've never taken a case as a matter of relaxation. We can't run our firm on those lines."

"Still, I'd have thought you'd have straightened out the troubles just to do Percy Shadwell a good turn.

He seems quite a nice sort of person."

"He's always been dead straight with me, but if I handed the helping mitt to everyone I know who is in distress where would I finish? When my day's work is over I like a little amusement. And I don't go about looking for trouble. Why should I, when I find it all through the day?"

"You must have a very exciting life," said Eva Cunliffe. "I'd hate to be married to anyone in your job. I'd never know when they were going to come home in a coffin, and I think the strain would give me

wrinkles."

"That would indeed be a tragedy, Miss Cunliffe," said Mick. "I take it that you appreciate Mr. Angel as an escort because he never gets into trouble? Well, as poor Mr. Shadwell knows, there are very few things in this world likely to beat peace and security. I feel sure, Miss Cunliffe, that Mr. Angel can most effectively furnish you with both of them."

The smile on Angel's face became more fixed. There was now little trace of spontaneity behind it. He was

playing with his glass, remarked:

"My ways have not always led me away from

trouble, Mr. Cardby."

"Then learn a lesson," said Mick, grinning, "and see that your ways are arranged in such a way that they never lead you into real trouble. Small affairs might even give a moment's thrill. One big trouble can damn your life forever. I hope you never meet anything like that, Mr. Angel."

"So do I," remarked the man. For a moment he spoke as though he meant what he was saying. He poured out another three drinks, and then asked Constance Wheeler for a dance. Cardby decided to take a chance while they were away from the table. He raised his glass to Eva and said:

"Here's to hoping that your boy friend never falls

into trouble."

"You have got a morbid mind," commented the girl. "Robert isn't that sort. He doesn't get around as he used to. I think he is settling down. I was quite surprised when he asked me to come here with him tonight."

The girl seemed genuine. Cardby thought he had discovered the information for which he had pushed out the feeler. Eva Cunliffe was at the Castor Club to provide Robert Angel with a "front." It was a strange mix-up. The girl certainly did not fit into any scheme as a criminal. By the time the dance drew to a close Mick Cardby had decided upon his next move. He looked pointedly at his watch, and remarked to Constance:

"I'm used to all sorts of ungodly hours, but I don't reckon they can be any good for you. I think you'd better collect your gear, and I'll see you home. I do hope that you will both excuse us for pushing off in this manner? I've had my share of eating, drinking and dancing for one night. And I'm not quite as agile

in the early hours as I used to be."

The waiter brought the bill, and Angel poured out a final drink for Cardby. In the background Percy Shadwell fluttered around uncomfortably. Even the frequent brandies he had taken could no longer dull the rising feeling of apprehension. Percy didn't want to be a hero. Cardby collected his hat and coat, rejoined them for a moment at the table.

"It has been quite nice to meet in this way," he said. "Now that we know each other there's no reason why we shouldn't foregather at some future date. You'll

find the pair of us in here quite often."

"I must make a habit of dropping in more frequently

myself," said Robert Angel. "But I wish the place would brighten up a little."

"It does seem tragic. Still, let's hope that there is no trouble of any sort here while we are in the club. I'd hate to be landed into any kind of a brawl. I find that they are very bad for people with tired nerves. I'm sure to be dropping across you again in the near future. S'long."

The men shook hands ceremoniously before they parted. Shadwell took a handkerchief from his pocket, and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He was hopelessly out of his depth, felt more despondent than ever before.

Mick escorted Constance to her home, and a few minutes later was in bed himself. He decided that he had done enough for one night. At least, he had jockeyed for position, and believed that he had laid a little ground bait. That was quite enough for an opening night on a case. He was not like Percy Shadwell. Cardby slept soundly. Shadwell got drunk again, and fell on a divan in a drunken stupor.

After breakfast on the following morning Dick Cardby picked up the telephone book, and started to scan the names. While he was shaving he had recalled the name of Nina's wealthy husband. Now he wanted the address. He found it. They lived in Ebury Street. It was shortly after ten when he made his call. He was too early, and returned to the house half an hour later. Nina was still swathed in a brocade dressing gown. Mick could not see very much change in her. She had kept her looks, and her verve, seemed quite as cute as in the bygone days when she blazed her trail. The woman was plainly mystified as she led him into an over-ornate lounge. A maid arrived with morning coffee. Cardby commenced:

"You must wonder what on earth has brought me here, Nina. I reckon you thought I had vanished from you life forever. Detectives really aren't human. You can't lose 'em, and they crop up in the most unexpect i places. The world doesn't seem to have done you any harm, Nina, since we last met. Is every-

thing still looking good to your young eyes? I hope it is."

"Oh, I'm happy enough, Mick, and I must say that I'm glad to see you again. At moments, you know, I regret those bright days of the past. I do not think I was ever made to be an ornament in a house. Still, I've got almost everything I want, and not many people can say that these days."

"They certainly can't. Take my advice, Nina, and keep well away from the bright lights. They end up by burning most people. I've watched them as they were singed. Stick to the straight and narrow, kid.

You can't beat it."

"Now, Mick, I'm sure you haven't tracked me down here so that you can hand out a sermon. I never knew you when you were in that frame of mind. Now I want to be hearing what brings the great Sherlock

out here."

"Once, in the dim and distant past, I did you a good turn. You said I must let you know if a chance ever arose for you to repay the kindness. Well, Nina, the chance has arisen, and that is why I'm here. Do you mind giving me a helping hand in exchange for favours of long, long ago?"

"Lord, you'll end up by making me feel an old woman! Of course, I'll do anything within reason to help you, Mick. Are you in some sort of fix? I don't know what made me ask you that, since I've never known you when you weren't in a tangle of some sort or another. Go ahead. What is it?"

"I want you to give me the lowdown on a person who used to be a boy friend of yours. You've left him well behind in your life now, and you know that anything you tell me stays with me, and travels no further. I want to be hearing all you can tell me about the man, Robert Angel."

Nina sipped her coffee slowly, and stared at Cardby

with critical eyes.

"You know me well enough, Mick," she said, "to

know that I don't squeal."

"I don't want him for anything he did in the days when you knew him. I give you that promise, Nina.

This is a totally different matter. I am only interested in him because of something that happened during the past week or two. I know the man, but I don't know the details."

"There isn't very much I can tell you, Mick. We ran around together for a time, but Robert wasn't the sort who would open up. When I parted from him I didn't know much more than I did at the start. Tell me just what it is you want to know, and I'll see whether I can help you at all."

"I want to know who he is, what he is, what he does, and the names of the people he gets around with. That's an all-embracive question, Nina."

"I'll do my best. I don't think his real name is Robert Angel, but I'm not sure about it. I can't tell you anything about his parents, but he has got a sister named Laura living at Tulse Hill. From the fact that she was a shop assistant I don't think Robert has got very much in the way of a family tree. What does he do? That's a tough question, Mick. When I knew him he was always fairly well provided with money. I rather think blackmailing married women was his strong suit. When he'd had a few too many drinks he used to boast about the money he'd taken them along the road for. Apart from that he used to do a bit of touting for a few high class gaming dives, and, I think, a few fashionable brothels. Well, what else is there you want to know about him? I'm about through."

"You're doing very nicely, Nina. You must have met his friends, or call them associates if you like. What can you tell me about those people?"

"Very little. He spent words like a miser spending money—when it came to talking about himself. His friends were an odd lot. Most of them were very ordinary. I hated the sight of them. He had one friend, though, who was a bit different. He hadn't been back from the States for very long. I'm not quite sure about his, but I think his name was Kendal. Yes, I'm sure that was the name, Cuthbert Kendal. He was a weird bird, Mick."

### CHAPTER THIRTEEN

#### NO QUIET EVENING

MICK CARDBY smiled broadly and pulled out his

cigarettes. He said :

"Now I think you're handing me some assistance, Nina. I know a bloke with that name. I'm going to describe him to you, and then I'd like to hear whether I have hit the bull with the first shot. This man is ... "

A minute later Nina nodded her head with almost

undue emphasis, said:

"There couldn't be the slightest doubt about it, Mick. That is the man all right. What an amazing thing that you should have run into him. How on earth did that happen? Or am I asking for strict trade secrets ?"

"No, Nina. As a matter of fact, he arranged to have me murdered. So you'd think I was entitled to declare that I know him almost as an intimate. Now let me know how he came to be tied up with Robert Angel,

please."

"Oh, there's nothing very involved about it. Robert introduced me to the man in a club, and after that we met on a number of occasions. I must say that there was no love on my part for Cuthbert Kendal. I hated the very sight of the man, and I told Robert a hundred times that if he tried travelling along the road with Kendal he would come to a sticky end."

"What was there about Kendal to give you that

impression about him?"

"He wasn't human. I wasn't always on the straight myself, Mick, but I did know where to draw the line. Cuthbert Kendal had no line. The funny thing is that I never knew him to be connected with crime. I only heard him expressing a few views about it, and they used to give me an attack of palpitation. He hadn't got a heart, a nerve, or any human blood in his body. He'd have murdered his own mother, or his own children, if he'd have thought there was some money in it. Why, Mick, that man would talk about death-violent death-with as much feeling as if he was ordering a meal. I know something about men. I served a stiff apprenticeship. And I knew instinctively that Cuthbert Kendal was rotten from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. He was just a regular walking devil."

"And you say you never knew him handling any sort

of crime, Nina?"

"I did not. I never could understand how he came to handle so much money. But there was no doubt about the fact that he had it. I saw plenty of it. He wanted to start spending some of his roll on me. But not for this child. I took one look at him, and felt cold in the stomach!"

"Then you don't know that Robert Angel ever worked with him, or for him? Don't dash in with an answer,

Think it over carefully for an instant."

"There's no need for me to start thinking. While I went about with the boy he never pulled a stroke with Cuthbert Kendal. If he did I never had any news about it. But I can tell you this-that on a score of odd occasions I heard Kendal telling him that one day they would have to get together. I always told Robert that he'd sign his death warrant if he ever started working in harness with Kendal. Robert couldn't see that at all. He was a conceited young fool, and believed that he was tough. Tough! A man like Kendal made Robert look like a baby sucking at a bottle!"

"You're helping me a lot now, Nina. Let's travel a little further. Did Cuthbert Kendal get around with other people, either men or women?"

"Very seldom. That was one of the reasons why I mistrusted him. I never did like those solitary birds. There's something radically wrong, I think."

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Nina. If I told you that Robert Angel is working with Cuthbert Kendal

now, what would be your first reaction?"

"To say 'God help Robert Angel!' With that man by his side he'll end up on the gallows. The only difference about their finish would be that Robert would squeal like a stuck pig, and Cuthbert Kendal would walk up the steps with as much feeling as if he were climbing the stairs in his own home. Is it true that they are working together now, Mick? I'd very much like to think that you've got the wrong end of the story."

" I don't think there is any hope that I'm wrong, Nina. I wondered who was at the back of the case I'm handling. Now I know. That man fits into the picture in every detail. Well, now I know just what I

am fighting." "For God's sake be careful, Mick! That man is a born killer. He wouldn't think twice about murdering anyone who got in his way. Look after yourself if you meet that man again. Maybe you had the luck when he tried to see you off before. In your life, Mick, you've had a thundering good share of the luck, but it won't travel that way for ever. Kendal is just the sort of man who would see that it doesn't. He'd never give you a chance."

"A fearsome character. Well, Nina, I don't think there is any more you can usefully tell me, but I'm more than glad that I came along. Take my word for it, you have been a very great help. I'll be getting

along."

"I'm glad to have seen you again, Mick, but sorry to hear the news you brought. It sounds to me very much as though Robert Angel will end up on the gallows, and you'll be decorating a mortuary. And that doesn't please me a bit. Take my tip, and pull

the trigger before he can start."

Mick Cardby felt more elated as he returned to the Ever since the day when he left Kendal's office he had looked forward to meeting the man again. Now it had happened. This time they could fight with the gloves off. The prospect filled him with a curious exhilaration. He paced into the office, and was stopped by Miss Constance Wheeler.

"Will you please telephone your home at once, Mr.

Cardby?" she said.

"Back to the old, formal life already, Angelic? How is the head today?"

"None the better for drinking buckets of champagne. Those nights don't suit me at all. And there are people

about who pretend to enjoy them!"

"Don't be too critical. It is a ten to one bet that you have to repeat the performance tonight. That'll give you plenty to think about during the rest of the day. What is this business about the call from my home?"

"You must telephone at once. I don't know anything

further, Mr. Cardby."

"I'll give them a tinkle in a moment. Beautiful, if I have to visit the Castor Club tonight, and you don't feel strong enough to make the trip, I think I could arrange for someone else to go along there with me. But I will be quite honest, and say that it would suit my game much better if you accompanied me. It might look fishy if I suddenly switched partners."

"Perhaps it would. All right, Mr. Cardby; let me know the worst later in the day. I'll just sit here and hope for the best. I'll get your home for you if you're ready to take the call. Will that do?"

"Certainly. Has my father put in an appearance yet,

Beautiful?"

"No. He made the call from your home. I believe he was waiting there until he heard from you. Wait for a moment, and I'll put you through."

The call was soon made. The father seemed relieved

to hear Mick's voice.

"That's good," he said. "I had no idea where to find you. I wish, Mick, you'd give me some idea of your programme when you drift out of the house. Percy Shadwell has been on the line two or three times. He is most anxious to see you as soon as possible. The poor bloke sounds more than a bit agitated. I said that immediately I had had a word with you I would give him a ring. So what have you got to say about it, Mick?"

"Tell him a get out of his place as quietly as possible, and to make sure that he is not being followed. Then I will meet him in the Coronet Tea Shop at the corner of Marylebone High Street. I'll be along

there in half an hour. But I don't want him to arrive with a tail fastened on him."

"I'll tell him right away, Mick. Anything you want me to do now?"

"No, Dad. Put your feet back on the mantel."

Mick Cardby was taking no chances. He did not wait in the Coronet. The game to him was old. He waited in the angle of a door fifty yards from the Coronet, watched Percy Shadwell enter, waited for another four or five minutes, made sure that the man was not followed, and then joined him in the shop. Shadwell was falling to pieces. The man had plainly got the jitters. His hands were shaking, and he could not keep still. Percy had come down the slide with no mean much. Cardbox and foodd him. mean rush. Cardby sat and faced him.

"I take it," he said, after ordering coffee, "that the enemy has been over to you with some sort of an ultimatum. Let's hear about it all."

"They certainly have been to see me. That man you were talking to last night told his boss that you were a member of the club, and that you were in there with a girl. I was told at once that I must bar you, that if I allowed you in the club again they would not guarantee what would happen. They mentioned that it might mean a murder, but that whatever they did it would be damned unpleasant for me. I told them a tale, said that if I barred you it would immediately make you very suspicious, and that would make things bad for me. Their reply was that nothing you could do was likely to be as unpleasant as what they would do if I let you in. I argued with the man, Angel, for a long time. Then he said he'd have another word with the boss. He asked me point blank whether I had employed you to keep an eye on the club. I said that

"You must have played the cards well last night, I had not. Mr. Cardby, because Angel v/asn't at all sure about it. He asked me that question a score of times, and each time I told him that you were an old member. I kept on telling him that since you knew nothing whatever about what was going on it would look damned funny, and very suspicious, for me to drop on you like a bolt. from the blue, and inform you that you must get out of the Castor Club, and stay out. After all, if I hadn't employed you, what on earth would you have thought? I believe that Angel began to see the real sense in what I was telling him, because at the end of it he said I was to do nothing about it until I heard from him again. I asked what I must do if you turned up at the club tonight. He said that if I had had no instructions to the contrary I must act as I usually did. But when he was leaving he laughed, and said it was quite possible that they might arrange a small party for you at the club. And, believe me, I didn't like the sound of that laugh one bit. If you come to the Castor Club tonight I reckon there'll be a riot, if there isn't a murder. So what about it?"

"You've played your cards very nicely so far, Mr. Shadwell. Travel along the same road, and we'll be getting somewhere. I think you may take it as a certainty that I will be in the club tonight. If any trouble starts you can leave me to look after myself. Perhaps the king-pin of the mob thinks his best move would be to beat me out of the club. Or he may have more serious ambitions. I can't say. But insist all the time that you've given me no instructions whatever, and keep repeating what you have already told them—that if you show me the door I will become at once as suspicious as hell, and then trouble is sure to start."

"Suppose Angel comes back later in the day to tell me that his boss has decided that you must be barred

from the club? What do I do then?"

"Tell them that you won't take the responsibility yourself. Pitch them the tale that you are frightened of me, and so are the waiters. Then you can inform Angel that if I have got to be shown the door he must send along the man, or the men, to do it. If you can impress that tale upon him, it puts you in the clear, and proves to them that you are telling the truth. At least, they can't say you refused to have me thrown out."

"It sounds very much to me as though there's going to be a riot in the Castor Club tonight no matter which way I turn. I don't like it a bit."

"Nor do I, but what sort of choice have we got? Tonight, Mr. Shadwell, you'll need to have every faculty you have got geared up into top. You will be needing clear thinking more than you ever needed it in your life before. That being the case, I'm going to give you some advice. If you don't accept this advice you'll end up by wrecking the whole party. When you leave me get along to a Turkish baths. See that they knock all that brandy out of your system. Then help yourself to a really solid lunch. Immediately you've had it take off your clothes, and get into bed. Stay there until about eight o'clock, and then take another good meal. By then you should feel a lot more like facing a difficult evening. There is another reason why I'm giving that advice. For a time it will keep you out of the way. I would prefer that Angel could not find you."

"I'll do that, Mr. Cardby. After all, you're the last prop I've got left, and I've got to put confidence in somebody, haven't I? Do you want me to go now, or is there anything else you want to say, Mr. Cardby?"

"Don't get panicky tonight, but if they get in touch with you at all telephone my home, and let me know what instructions they have given you. I don't want to buy any pig in a poke when you can easily pass along the information. I'm getting back to the office now, but don't under any sort of circumstance try to get in touch with me there. It is too dangerous. I am going now. Wait here for at least five minutes after I've gone."

Mick returned to the office immediately. He paused for a moment to speak to Constance Wheeler. He was

smiling as he said to her:

"I understand your main trouble last night was that nothing happened. You found the Castor Club somewhat dull. In fact, you were bored stiff. I think I can promise you that you'll have no ground for that complaint if you accompany me tonight. Actually, in more ways than one, I think you will find it beyond any doubt the most lively club you have ever entered in your life. Mark you, Angelic, I'm not promising that the liveliness will be your favourite brand. I'm only saying that you will not be in any way bored. Does that bring any reassurance to your young and eager mind?"

"So long as it isn't a repetition of last night I don't mind. What is the special entertainment likely to

brighten up the place so much ?"

"You'd be surprised, sister! This will be a West End speciality act, a turn so thrilling that it will make cabaret appear stupid. Don't say that I never provide you with thrills, Beautiful. Are you game to go with me?"

"After the alluring picture you've been painting, I'd very much like the chance. What are the arrangements

-the same as last night, or not?"

"Precisely the same, and you take the time off again from the office. I would like to see you at the height of your staggering attractiveness."

"In that case I wouldn't advise you to pour champagne into me as though I'm a sink. I'll be ready and

waiting for you as before, Mr. Cardby."

"Better get into practice again by calling me Mick. It slips quite easily off the tongue after a time. I'm not staying here for very long myself. Something seems to tell me that I'm going to have a tiring night."

It was the middle of the afternoon, and Mick was in bed, when the call came through from Percy Shadwell.

The man's manner seemed calmer.

"I have had another visit from Robert Angel," he said. "I am to allow you into the club. Angel told me that his boss had made his own private arrangements about your visit to the club, and that I need not bother myself any further. I don't know just what all

that means. Perhaps you do."

"I've got a fairly shrewd idea about it all. Now listen to me. I want to see you about seven o'clock this evening. I think the best place would be the saloon bar of the 'Rainbow' in Kennington Lane. That would take you right off your path. Push a dozen membership cards in your pocket, and when I see you I'll give you a few instructions. For the love of Mike don't change into the glad rags until you have seen me.

Evening dress doesn't look so good in Kennington Lane, Mr. Shadwell."

"God alone knows what sort of an idea you've got in your head now, but I've got the instructions all right,

and I'll be there on time, Mr. Cardby."
"Right you are now. Now you can clamber back into bed for another two hours. Are you remembering

to lay off the brandy, and did you take a bath?"

"Oh, yes. I'm doing exactly what you told me to do, but I'll tell you here and now that every time I think about what might happen tonight I feel sick, and my stomach starts turning somersaults. Do you happen to know of any cure for that, Mr. Cardby, or haven't they ever invented one?"

"The best cure is to take a strong bromide, and then persuade yourself that you've been very busy worrying about things that might never happen. I'll be seeing you at the 'Rainbow,' and don't forget the cards."

When Mick arrived once again at the Castor Club

with Constance, they found a slight change from the previous night. There were perhaps eighty people in the club-almost double the number. Mick gazed around and wondered whether the increase was by design or accident; also he was speculating as to the number of non-members among them.

It was shortly after midnight when the swing doors opened to admit Robert Angel and his girl friend. They waved a flippant hand to Cardby, and a few moments later stood by the side of the table. Angel asked:

"Would you object if we resurrected the party of last night? It seemed to be quite successful. The

place seems to have filled up more, Mr. Cardby."
"Yes, it does. We don't in the least object. Sit down, by all means, and we'll take a drink. I don't know whether you are entering for the grub stakes, but we have already eaten. I must say the food here is very good."

It did not require a very observant eye to notice that the patrons of the club were a mixed bunch. There may have been some social cream in the room, but there were plenty of others who had no name on the register. Cardby thought that this particularly applied

H.

to the women. Definitely, they were not of the Castor Club type, although he could have fastened a description on quite a number of them. He danced with Constance.

"I thought you told me," she said, "that this was going to be a lively night. Mick. I must say that I

don't see any signs of it at the moment."

"The night is young, lady. Don't kid yourself that all is set for a long period of dullness. It isn't. Haven't you heard of the lull before the storm? Well, this is one of 'em. If trouble does start, for the love of Mike see that you don't get hurt. I reckon your best move would be to beat a retreat to the ladies' room, and then turn the key in the door. Play safe."

Mick sipped his champagne sparingly. Constance pleaded a hangover, and drank very little indeed. But Robert Angel took plenty. Cardby watched him closely, and wondered whether the man drank out of bravado, or whether he was trying to dose himself with a load of false courage. Yet Robert did not seem the sort of man who would require assistance for his nerves. He seemed to have them well under control at all times.

Percy Shadwell looked infinitely better. He even regained some of his lost smile, and the hands were no longer jerking. Another score of people entered the club. The atmosphere was becoming quite festive. In the far corner of the room a large party surrounded a table. There were five men and four women. They grew more and more boisterous, insisted upon singing with the band. Shadwell looked at them occasionally, and winced. A month before they would have received their marching orders.

Suddenly one of the men at the table shouted out a curse, jumped to his feet, and struck at the man by his side. Instantly, the nine people were milling in a fight round the table. The course of action forced two of the men back on the floor. They began to fight a retreat. And their line of retreat was leading them backwards immediately towards the table at which Mick Cardby was sitting. He bent over to Constance,

said:

"This, child, is where the liveliness begins. I told you that it would not be a quiet night. When they get a bit nearer start moving, and don't bother to look round. I'll let you know when things have settled down."

Constance Wheeler had just risen to her feet when one of the men on the dance floor received an enormous push. He staggered back across the floor, and each step he made brought him directly towards Mick Cardby. Robert Angel's lips were tightly pressed together. Then the man was flung again, and he came hurtling straight for Mick Cardby!

# CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### TRYING TIMES

CARDBY slid from his chair, and the falling man missed him by inches. As the man toppled over the empty chair the detective bent over him. Women in the crowd shrieked. They saw the champagne bottle rise and fall. They could even hear the thud of the blow, and they saw the man sink slowly from across the chair to roll on the floor against the table. The second man shouted, and sprang towards Cardby with his hands outstretched for Mick's throat. The bottle struck him slightly below the left ear, and he spun round twice before subsiding on the dance floor.

Mick backed away a little. He wanted Robert Angel before him, not at the table behind him. Women were shrieking, and men were bellowing for the police. And at that moment the main attack commenced. The remaining three men in the party made a joint rush. From the manner of their movement Cardby could see that this was no new game for them. They knew the real technique of rough-house fighting. One of them had a soda syphon in his hand, a second carried an open razor, and the third wielded a short rubber truncheon. They spread out a little as they approached. The gloves were off with a vengeance. There could be

no further doubt about the purpose of the mock fight in the corner.

Robert Angel moved forward slightly, and Cardby

snapped out to him:

"Sit down, and keep your hands on the top of the table. Don't try any funny stuff. Look after your girl friend, and stay out of this party."

The advancing trio received a sudden shock. They were working quite in accordance with an orthodox plan. They were trying to crowd Cardby into the corner. Then they could start to work on him with great ease. For a moment it seemed that the scheme would work out well. It might have been a success. But Cardby slithered forward instead of retreating. The man with the razor received a crash from the champagne bottle directly in the face. He roared with pain, toppled backwards, and lay still. It was difficult to see his face. It was masked in blood. Before the man had hit the floor the hoodlum with the truncheon took a round-arm swipe at the detective's head. Mick swerved away from it, jumped forward underneath the flaying arm to take the man off balance, and then lashed out once again with the bottle. He struck the man on the neck, and his head at once jerked back. Cardby knew that one man at least was out of the party for the duration of the fight. He had hit men before on the side of the neck, and he never remembered one of them coming back for a repeat dose.

The man with the syphon seemed to lose some of his aggressive spirit. He glanced quickly at the men on the floor, backed away a little from Mick Cardby, and then threw the syphon. The detective ducked, and the flying syphon flicked his ear as it passed. He heard a groan behind him, but did not turn. Instead, he jumped towards the syphon-thrower. The man twisted round to beat a retreat. He was too late. The bottle struck him with full force at the base of the skull, and he slithered along the floor for ten or twelve

feet before coming to a motionless stop.

The tumult in the room became deafening. Women were standing on the tables screaming and yelling. Men were shouting for the police until they were hoarse.

Cardby had a chance to glance slightly behind him. At once he knew the reason for the groan. The flying syphon had struck Eva Cunliffe between her eyes. She was a crumpled heap on the floor. Robert Angel was paying no attention to her. Instead he stared fixedly at Mick Cardby. The detective hesitated for a moment. He knew the fight had only just begun, but he did not know from which direction the next assault was coming. And he did not know what Robert Angel intended to do.

Cardby saw the formation massing. Men were rising from tables in all parts of the room. And they were not the men who had been calling for the police. They moved separately, and in couples, across the floor, and round the border of the room. The purpose was obvious. They meant to take Cardby from both sides, and from the front. He counted them roughly, and reckoned he was facing twelve or fourteen toughs. And not for an instant did he forget Robert Angel. That man was too close to be at all comfortable. The fact that he ignored his injured girl friend brought no solace to Cardby's mind. Mick waited with a sneering smile on his face.

He even laughed as he threw the champagne bottle at one of the men, and laughed again when the bottle struck the man across the mouth. Then Cardby stood with his hands on his hips. The neutral members of the party were staggered. The detective held nothing whatever in his hands. The advancing men were quick to notice that his hands were empty. There was a sudden silence. Everyone knew what that meant. men were pausing before flinging themselves on Cardby. Even the women ceased screaming, and the men no longer bellowed for police assistance.

Mick Cardby waited for a full second. The crowd

became ever more silent.

There was no need for Cardby to raise his voice. He spoke in almost conversational tones, but the words

astonished everyone in the room:

"You can join in now, boys. Two of you look after the front door. Two get along to the back. The rest of you gather round me. Make it snappy."

The men moving towards Cardby halted in the middle of their strides. They stared round the room. Some faces lost their colour, and one or two of the men started backing away down the room. Nine or ten men had moved from their seats. They were young men, and they bore none of the traces of the professional blackguard. By the time the exits were covered Mick had five men standing clustered around him. Robert Angel was biting his lip, and his finger nails were bedded in the tablecloth.

"Everyone who has no part in this must sit still," called Cardby. "If they move they'll get hurt, and it'll be their own fault. Right, boys?"

The men surrounding him nodded. The other gang backed down the room until they stood with their backs to the band platform. Cardby poked a hand into the tail pocket of his evening coat. He produced a short teak truncheon. The light flashing from the chandeliers showed the brass nails embedded in the wood. The other men dived into their pockets. Each one carried something more useful than a fist. Slowly, they started to move down the room. The members of the orchestra started to jump down from the platform. They realised that they would be very much in the front line.

They were not more than a couple of yards away from the scowling mob of men when Cardby cursed violently. Every light in the place had gone out! There were renewed shrieks, and the men began to scream hysterically.

"You saw where they stood," called Cardby. "Let them have it before they can get among the crowd. Jump into it, boys! Here I go!"

The Castor Club that night attained one unpleasant distinction. There was staged upon the august pre-mises the most violent, the most savage rough-house melee ever seen in the West End. Arms were flaying, men were groaning, blows were thudding, and from the circle of people about the room a regular roar of screams rose and fell. Cardby dare not take any notice of anyone who arrived near him. His own boys were too close. The chance, the only chance, was to strike at anything in front of him that sounded like a movement. His arm was rising and falling until he found nothing but space facing him. He wanted to shout to Shadwell. The uproar made any effort useless. Around him men were panting, striking, and groaning. At his feet were people whimpering with fear and pain. He trod on one or two of them, and jumped back quickly in case he should be tripped. Cardby realised that the danger point had been reached, called:

"Lay off, boys. We'll soon be hurting each other. Stand still while I try to find that main switch." He drew in a deep breath, and then bawled out at the top

of his voice:

"Will one of the waiters find that main switch, or find Mr. Shadwell? We must have those lights turned

While he waited he turned and twisted constantly. He had no idea how many of the hoodlums were still on their feet. And, after all, they could afford to take

a blind crack at anyone. He called out again :

"Back away towards the centre of the dance floor.
I'd rather wait there in the open. As you go back-

wards hit anyone who moves in front of you."

They retreated slowly. The wails of the women still sounded through the place. Men were coughing nervously. They had ceased shouting. Once they were grouped in the centre of the room, Mick handed out another order:

"Don't make any other move, boys. In another moment we'll have a light. Take it easy for a second, and then we'll see what the damage is."

When the lights at last blazed again Cardby—and all the other folk in the room—found the momentary blindness more trying than the dark. Mick closed his eyes two or three times, and opened them slightly. Then he could see, although the stream of light threw stabs of pain into the backs of his eyes. He looked around. The place was a shambles. Oddly enough, he first stared towards the far end of the room. He swore. Robert Angel was no longer there. Yet the men still stood with their backs against the front and rear exits.

Mick moved towards the band platform. Their "bag" had been complete. A man was crumpled over the edge of the platform, and another was clinging to the back of a chair. All the others were sprawled on the floor. Cardby saw that one of his own boys was among them. Mick pointed to him, said:

"One of you take a look at Ginger, will you? I'm going to start giving the place the once-over. I can't see the man I wanted to collect. The rest of you remain in the centre of the floor. I'm not sure yet that the song and dance is quite over. Don't take any chances. If any of the crowd starts moving towards you let them have it. They can't blame you at all."

you let them have it. They can't blame you at all."

Mick headed towards a crouched and trembling waiter who stood close to the wall at the near end of the room. The man had saliva dribbling down his chin, and his limbs were trembling as though palsy had gripped him. Cardby touched him softly on the shoulder, and said gently:

"Would you mind showing me the way to your

main light switch?"

The waiter pointed towards the door leading to Shadwell's office. Mick passed through the door, walked along the short passage, and found all he wanted to see. At the side of the light switch a waiter was kneeling on the floor. Between his hands he held the head of the unconscious Percy Shadwell! Cardby thought he could guess what had happened without asking for information. The waiter looked up at the detective dubiously, said:

"I fell over him when I came in to turn on the

lights. He looks out."

Mick ran a practised hand over Shadwell's head. He found a lump the size of a billiard ball. There was

no other trace of injury.

"I'll carry him into his office," Mick said to the waiter, "and then you can treat him with iced water and smelling salts. Don't start sending for a doctor. Mr. Shadwell isn't badly hurt. He'll very soon come round. I don't want you to leave him until I come back. Do your best with him."

Mick telephoned to the divisional police station,

managed after some waiting to speak to Inspector

Garr. Cardby tried to save time as he said:
"Mick Cardby speaking from the Castor Club. There's been a serious riot here, and a dozen men are hurt. I want you to come round with four or five men, and a Black Maria. You'll need the van to cart the men away. I can tell you later what caused it all. Don't be too long, Inspector."

"My God!" exclaimed Inspector Garr. "So you've been amusing yourself again, Mick! I'll be with you

inside five minutes. Don't kill anyone."

Mick walked back into the dance room, stood on the

platform, as he said:

"No person is allowed to leave this room. The police will be here very shortly. Until they arrive sit tight. Take it easy, and have a drink. I'm thinking that by now some of you can do with one. I don't blame you."

The patrons sat down again. The wails had ceased. Now they were even too frightened to whisper. They stared at each other like a flock of startled sheep. One of his boys walked over to Cardby, and remarked:

"You don't have to worry about Ginger. I didn't think they could hurt that kid very much. He ducked too late, and stopped a crack at the side of his eye. In another five minutes he'll be sitting up and drinking nourishment. It was a nice little party, Mick, while it lasted, wasn't it?"

"I'm damned sorry those lights were turned out. I've missed the man I wanted mostly. I think he did a moonlight through one of the windows. Oh, I'd for-

gotten all about his girl friend. I'll take a look."

Mick Cardby's lip curled as he saw the unconscious girl still lying a heap on the floor. Eva Cunliffe might have been Robert Angel's girl friend, but he had certainly run out—or climbed out !—on her. Cardby felt her pulse and examined her for a moment. The kid was a hospital case. He lifted her, carried her a few yards along the room, and laid her on a divan.
The patrons were becoming restive. Mick knew why. They all possessed one great ambition. They wanted to create an amount of space between themselves and the Castor Club.

Inspector Garr marched into the room with a sergeant and two constables. He surveyed the scene for

a brief moment, and then joined Cardby.

"What the hell have you been doing here?" he asked. "I'm damned well fed up with this Castor Club. For months it was the best run place on my beat. And now every time there is trouble in the West End I find it here. Have you been having a private war, or did the roof fall in on 'em?"

"I'll tell you the full story later on at the station. A man was trying to collect two hundred a week protection money. He staged the usual acts of intimidation to frighten Percy Shadwell into paying. He was alone responsible for all the trouble you've had so far. Shadwell engaged me to see what could be done, and the man at the back of the mob heard a whisper that I was investigating his racket. He thought he could kill two birds with one stone. In the first place, he thought a first-class row in the Castor Club would force Shadwell's hand a little more. And he worked it out that by working on me he could achieve two objectives. He could have me bashed up so that I was out of the way for a month or two. And by smashing me up while I was in the Castor Club he could prove to Shadwell that I was useless, that I could give him no protection at all, that I was not even in a strong enough position to protect myself.

"That, Inspector, was a very pretty scheme, and it could have worked out like four aces. But a little bird whispered in my ear. I could see a mile away what the man intended to do. I thought it over, and decided that my best move was to stage a counter attack. I get around in London. You know that. I have a number of curious friends. I recruited them. I got Shadwell to give me a bundle of membership cards for them, and said I'd see them at the club. I warned them not to start anything until they heard from me. The row was forced on me exactly as I thought it would be. I laid out the men lying on the floor at the other end of the room. Then the other bunch started a mass attack. I told the boys to block the exits and join in the party. We were just going to start when all the

lights were turned out. We fought in the dark. On the floor here you can see the result of the fight. I don't think I can say any more, Inspector."

"I'd imagine that you've said plenty," remarked Garr drily. "Now tell me what you want me to do with all

these blokes. I've got the van outside."

"The boy with the ginger hair is one of my bunch. You can leave him to me. Smack the rest of them into the cells and charge them as soon as they come round. Once you've seen this pack of hoodlums sentenced you'll be getting somewhere towards stopping this protection racket in the West End. The bosses can't follow the trade without their strong-arm boys."

"I'd rather start by collecting the man at the top of the heap. Where do I find him, Mick? I expect

you know pretty well who he is."

"I've a vague idea, but I wouldn't like you to make a jump until I'm certain. The man I have in my mind has beaten so many raps that you'd waste your time collecting him until you had a case beyond argument."

"You're an elusive devil. I'll be talking to you in

a minute. Hang on."

The police started work. Five minutes later the Castor Club looked almost normal. While the men were being flung into the Black Maria, Mick asked one of the women to escort him to the ladies' cloakroom. He walked in to discover Constance Wheeler

lying on the parquet floor!

There was an ugly wound at the side of her head, and blood had trickled down over her ear and along the ground. She was totally unconscious. Mick grew paler as he bent over her. She was badly hurt. Cardby thought a dozen stitches would be needed. He raised the girl gently, and placed her on a settee. Her breathing was heavy and laboured. He said to the woman:

"Don't get panic-stricken, madam. I want you to bathe this girl's face very tenderly while I telephone

for a doctor. Be gentle with her, please."

Mick was surprised to find when he reached out for the telephone receiver that his hand was trembling. He knew why. There was nothing wrong with his nerves, and he had taken too many shocks to be affected badly by them. He found that his legs, too, were quivering. Mick Cardby laughed harshly. He knew only too well that he was shaking and trembling because he was in the throes of a violent temper!

### CHAPTER FIFTEEN

#### MARKING TIME

THE DETECTIVE'S doctor promised to make fast time to the club. Cardby returned to the ladies' cloakroom. On the way he collected Inspector Garr, led him into the room, and pointed to the still form of Constance Wheeler. The officer knew that something extraordinary had happened. Mick Cardby's face was almost a dead white, and the sides of his mouth were twitching. Even his voice quavered as he said to the Inspector:

"My secretary, Miss Constance Wheeler. I sent her

in here for safety."

Garr looked at Cardby, and understood. Mick was taking it badly, and it did nothing to calm him when he sighted the wide open window at the end of the room. He walked over to it, stood on a chair, and looked out. It was an easy exit. The window was not more than fifteen feet above ground level. The drop was easy for any young man. Cardby remarked to Garr:

"It looks pretty simple to me now, Inspector. A man dashed out to get at the main switchboard. Percy Shadwell was standing close to it. The man coshed Shadwell, and then pulled the main switch. He must have realised that he couldn't help his mob in any other way. The man found that he couldn't get out through any of the windows in that passage, and he knew I'd posted men at the exits. He dashed in here, found Constance Wheeler here, and gave her a savage crash. He knew that she was my secretary. Then he opened the window, and did a drop. It must have happened that way."

"You say the man knew that this girl was your

secretary. If you are so certain about that fact it can only mean that you know the man. Give me his name, Mick, and I'll damned soon put him where he belongs."

"That's just the trouble, and that's just why I'm not giving you the name," said Mick quietly. "You wouldn't put the man where he belongs. You are thinking about the cells. I am not. I am thinking that he belongs to a hospital—and when I find him that is where he will finish! You can have him when the doctors have finished with him. No, Inspector, this man isn't a criminal any more as far as I'm concerned. He's just my Private Enemy Number One. I'll be looking for him very soon."

"And you don't want me to help you by throwing out a dragnet? I'm sure that I could soon find him

for you, Mick, so why not let me help you?"

"I'd run too big a risk. You might arrest him before I had a chance to catch up with him. And that

wouldn't suit me at all. No, thanks."

The doctor arrived, and made a brief examination. Within a minute he instructed Mick to telephone for an ambulance, at once, remarking: "This poor girl has stopped a nasty one, Mick. The sooner she is patched up the better. I can't do anything for her while she is here."

Time seemed to drag while they waited for the ambulance. Constance had only just been removed when Cardby was told that Shadwell had recovered consciousness. He hurried along to see the man. Percy

"Bad luck, old timer," said Mick; "but you'll be glad to know that we are getting somewhere now.

Now, tell me how all this happened."

Mick had purposely left Inspector Garr behind him. He didn't want the officer to hear the statement. Shadwell spoke with some difficulty. He had suffered slight

concussion, and it had left something of a stutter.

"That swine, Angel," he said. "I had a hunch when the row started that some smart Alec might try to turn out the lights. So I came in here, and stood against the switch. Angel must have noticed it when he has passed through to my office. He came dashing in, and caught me unexpectedly. I never had a chance. I don't know what he had in his hand, but it most certainly wasn't his fist he hit me with. I didn't know anything about it until three or four minutes ago. What on earth has been happening?"

"Plenty, but I don't want you to bother your head about it just now. I think your best move is to lock up, and move along to a hospital for a few hours. You're not steady enough on your feet to start moving about, and, in any case, I'd rather know that you were bedded down in a safe spot for the next twenty-four hours. There's just a faint chance that by the time you come out of the hospital your troubles will be over. Here's to hoping so. I'll get an ambulance for you, and if you'll give me the keys of the club I'll lock the place, and see that everything is all right. Don't spruce yourself that you're quite fit now. You're not. And I ought to know. I've stopped a few cracks at one time or another."

Percy Shadwell made no attempt to argue. The man was perilously near the point of collapse. It was not long before he was moved. Cardby joined Inspector Garr in the club, asked for permission to speak to the patrons.

"You now have permission to leave the premises, but each one of you must leave a name and address as you pass through the front door. In any case where you carry no membership card your identity will be checked. Please pass out as quietly as possible, and don't hang about outside."

They did not require any further invitation to leave the Castor Club. Their procession to the cloakrooms was a jumbled race. Mick followed by sending the waiters home. Then he had a few words with the boys who had joined in the fight. They had been regaling themselves with champagne.

"Thanks for all you did," he said. "I knew as soon as I asked you that you'd rally round. Ginger looks a bit shaky, but he'll be all right. One of you must go home with him. If you'll call at my offices in two or three days' time I'll hand each of you a small present

for work well done. I'll tell the police that your names and addresses don't matter."

Ten minutes later the Castor Club was locked up, and Cardby sat with Garr in the Inspector's room at

the police station.

"I think you'd better explain your programme," said the Inspector. "I can't let you handle a serious case like this on your own. Immediately I fill the dock in court with those thugs, the magistrate is going to ask me who is at the back of it all. The beaks know that rough-house blokes haven't usually got sense enough to organise things. And I can't keep your name out of it since the magistrate is certain to ask me what caused the row. Don't try to place me in an impossible position."

"It does look awkward Inspector," remarked Cardby, "but there is one very easy way out for you. Tender evidence of arrest, apply for a remand in custody in each case, and tell the beak that police inquiries are proceeding. Then honour will be satisfied on all sides, and I can work with complete freedom. There is no need for you to detail the evidence in any way, and the beak knows that you don't talk out of the top of your hat. How would that arrangement suit you, Inspec-

"It sounds as though it will have to suit me, Mick. All right, I'll do that, but I still want to know what you intend doing. Don't leave me in the dark, because I'll

be making plenty of inquiries myself."

"I want two men," replied Mick Cardby. "First of all I want the man who coshed Constance Wheeler. When I have made certain that he can't leave hospital for a week, or a month, I'm starting to search around for the man who started this racket. And when I've found him I'm going to throw in my hand, and take a nice, long holiday. Now you have the full and entire programme. It may sound a bit ambitious for a one-man job but I den't like working with a ground. You man job, but I don't like working with a crowd. You go your own way, Inspector, and if our paths cross we'll know at once that we're working along the right lines."

"Mick, you're as obstinate as a mule. I think your father ought to take you in hand. One day they'll be taking me to the mortuary to see if I can identify you.

Still, go ahead, and I'll wish you plenty of luck."

Mick borrowed the telephone to make a hospital call. Constance Wheeler was still unconscious. Cardby paced the West End pavements for an hour. Half a dozen times he stopped acquaintances, threw out questions about Robert Angel. Each time he drew blank. streets were becoming empty. He decided to return home, and settle down in bed. It was a certainty that Robert Angel would have run to earth for the night. Mick thought it would be best to mark time for a few hours until the man recovered some of his confidence. His father heard the front door open, jumped out of his bed to meet Mick in the lounge. For a quarter of an hour he heard the son's story, and the father grew more and more serious. He said:

"I'll have to join in with you now, Mick. Cuthbert Kendal may have been as dangerous as hell before, but what do you suppose he is like now? I'm betting that he is heading fast towards homicidal mania. You are crazy to think of taking the whole lot by yourself. What do you think another murder means to him? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He knows that once you have placed the finger on him he's finished. Men like Kendal, Mick, don't throw up their hands. He'll fight like a madman to the finish. I've met the sort. I cornered a man of that type once in Birmingham, and do you know what happened? I'll tell you. He fired at me two or three times, and he missed. He was firing from a window. I broke into the house. Three more shots were fired. And he wasn't aiming at me. He murdered his wife and son, and then blew his own brains out. There, Mick, you've got another Cuthbert Kendal. It is no hand to play solo. In the morning we'll decide which way we'll work. Now get along to bed, and forget it all."

Mick did not argue. It was useless. He knew only too well that his father was right. Kendal would shoot anything and anybody to evade arrest. This was the last thought passing through Mick's mind before he faded away into a sound sleep. And it was the first thought that occurred to him when he awakened in the

morning. Breakfast was a silent meal. Mrs. Cardby sat in between the father and son, and both were nervous to speak while she was in the room. She smiled tolerantly, and thought maybe these late nights did not suit her son as well as they used to. He wouldn't even take a third cup of coffee. So she warned him to make a bigger friend of his bed in the future. The father said he agreed entirely.

Mick rose from the table to make his first call to the hospital. The news was more consoling. Miss Wheeler had been operated upon, and had settled down quite peacefully. He gave instructions for her to be given anything she required or desired, and then turned

to his father:

"I'm going to do a small job now, Dad, and I don't want any help from you. In fact, this is a strictly solo hand I'm going to play. In about an hour I'll be at the office. When I arrive we can discuss matters. I hope that during the night you suffered an attack of

brainwaves. I didn't."

Mick took out his car, and drove to Ebury Street. Nina was still in bed, but his message to her had a ring of real urgency, and she appeared, sleepy-eyed and still

yawning. Mick wasted no time as he said to her:

"Nina, I very badly want Robert Angel, and I think he is on the run. I'll tell you just what happened in the early hours of this morning, and then you can work out for yourself how badly I want him. I was working on a job at the Castor Club in Great Newport Street, and with me . . . "

He cut out everything except the essential facts. Nina became more and more worried. As soon as he

had finished, the girl stood up and said:

"The lousy scab! I never thought he'd get down to that level, Mick. If I could help you find him I'd be only too glad. Now you can see what mixing up with Cuthbert Kendal has done for him, can't you?"

"I'll be looking for Kendal very soon, my dear. I'm not going to let a man get away with his game-particularly when he brings the play right to my own doorstep. But first of all I want to collect Robert Angel."

"I can't understand why you're working that way,

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Mick. After all, you know where Kendal has his office, and it wouldn't take a couple of ticks to discover where he lives. So why on earth don't you have a crack at him instead of putting the cart before the horse, and

going for Angel?"

"The answer is simple, Little One. Before I grab Cuthbert Kendal I want to find a man who will put in a squeal. The person who is in the best position to put in that loud squeal is Robert Angel. And by the time I have finished with him he'll squeal plenty whether he wants to or not. Once I lay my hands on Angel I shall reckon that I've got the whole case in the bag. Now, let's get down to what you know, and don't know."

"I can tell you for a start that I know very little

indeed, Mick."

"We will see. You must have been with him when he was establishing a few contacts. So let us refresh your memory, and see where it takes us to. During the time you knew him, did Angel live in one place, or did he get around a lot? And where did he live mostly while you were seeing him?"

"Oh, he was a bird of passage. He didn't like boarding houses, and he hated furnished flats. He lived all the time in hotels, and he was never satisfied. I must have known him make at least a dozen moves. But although he kept moving about he never would stay

outside the West End."

"I suppose you have been completely out of touch

with him for months ?"

"Of course. I haven't seen him since I got married. I used to be tough, but I still know how to play fair. I'm afraid I'm not helping you, Mick."

"We'll persevere, Nina. How would you reckon he

came to contact Shadwell?"

"Well, he got around plenty, and I suppose somebody must have taken him along to the Castor Club as a guest. I can't tell you just how he did come to meet Percy Shadwell—ah!—Shadwell? Wait a minute, Mick. You said that something might click in my mind. It has! I can give you one tip you can take as a blind bet if it is of any use at all to you."

"My dear girl, I'll try anything to find that man. What is it, Nina?"

"I thought nothing whatever about it until you brought up the name of Percy Shadwell. Then my memory started working. I'll have to tell you a very curious little story, Mick. Wait until I order some coffee. While I am waiting I may be able to get the

whole setting clearly in my head."

Mick Cardby watched the girl press the bell, and he lit a cigarette. Nina stood with her elbow on the mantelpiece, and said nothing. It was not until she had given the order to the maid that she resumed her seat. Then she accepted a smoke from the detective, and gazed at the floor as though searching for something lost. Suddenly the girl clicked her fingers, and turned to smile at Cardby as she said to him :

"I'm not promising that this information will help you on the way, but I feel mighty proud that I can remember things so clearly. I never knew before that my memory was as good as it is. I told you that the name of Percy Shadwell links up with a very

curious story. Well, it certainly does."

She paused again, obviously to grope round for a starting point. Mick made no attempt to hurry her.

That might be fatal.

"What I'm going to tell you," she said, "happened so long ago that I can't put a date on it. But the date doesn't really matter a hoot. All you need are the facts, and now I can give them to you. I met Robert Angel one night in the West End. He had promised to take me to a newly opened club, but when I met him he said he had a job of work to do, and would have to cancel the date with me. He said the job had been given to him by Cuthbert Kendal. I was annoyed, and we had a row. Robert said that if I would like to do a bit of what he called 'slumming,' I could go with him. I was at a loose end, and said I'd rather travel around the slums than hike around in the West End by myself.

"So he got his car out, and we had a most awful drive through the East End to Shadwell. Now you know why the name clicked in my mind. He said he had to give a message to a man from Kendal. I think

it was about the most depressing ride I've ever had in my life. The streets were so drab. I know that nearly every detail of that ride has stuck in my mind. When we got to the house he left me waiting outside in the car for nearly half an hour, and you can bet that didn't please me. All I could do was stare at the squalid street and the grimy houses. When he came out again he stood on the doorstep talking for a short time to a dreadful person, one of the most repulsive men I've

ever seen in my life.

"And now we come to the point of it, Mick. On the way back to the West End, Robert said that Kendal had a hide-out in nearly every place in London, and he told me that that was one of them. I remember saying that I'd rather be dead than I'd hide-out in that dump. Angel laughed, and said that one day he might be very glad to remember it. I said that a week in that place would kill him. He said a lot would depend upon what you were running away from, and that he could imagine being in such a fix that you could look upon the place as a little heaven. Well, Mick, you told me that Robert Angel is on the run. Now you've heard my funny story."

Mick Cardby stubbed out his cigarette, and turned to

Nina anxiously:

"It may be a blind bet," he said, "but it sounds good to me. Is there any chance at all that you could find

that place again, Nina?"

"I am quite sure I could. The journey was so awful that I'll never forget it, and I sat for half an hour staring at the name of the street. And I reckon that I know the shape of every brick in that house."

"Nina, I've got my car outside. Would you be a complete little heroine, and steer me to that dump in

Shadwell? I don't like missing chances."

"Carry on with your smoking, and take another cup of coffee, Mick. In less than half an hour I'll be with you. How does that suit the book?"

"You're a great kid, Nina. For myself, I'm ready

and roaring to go."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### MAKING HEADWAY

NINA returned well within the half-hour. When they were seated in the car, Mick asked the girl for some instructions, pointing out that he knew the East End as well as he knew Soho. What he wanted was a landmark.

"There's a place called Cable Street," she replied, "and if you will drive along that street I'll find the turnings all right. I'm sure that I couldn't forget them.

I'll leave it to you until we reach the street."

Their progress was slow. The morning traffic was heavy. Cardby did not realise until they reached Shadwell that his father would be having a few anxious moments. Mick had not kept his appointment at the office. As they passed along Cable Street he slowed down, and then for a matter of five or six minutes he followed the girl's instructions. As she gave the directions he realised how deep an impression that earlier journey had made upon her. He took a final left-hand turn. They were in a short and squalid street. Even the small houses looked depressed, almost ashamed of themselves. Mick stopped the car without waiting for further instructions.

"I dare not draw up too near to the house in case I've made a lucky trip," he explained. "I think you'd

better point out the place to me."

The girl indicated the place without an effort. It was too doors along beyond a barber's shop.

patted his pockets for a moment, said to her:

"This is where I repeat Robert Angel's performance, Nina, but the cause is a bit better this time. I'm going to leave you here. I'll be back as soon as I can fix things. This is going to be a very awkward job. you see any sign of fireworks I think you'd better jump into this driving seat and get to hell out of here. I don't want you to get into a mess."

"Believe me, Mick," she said, "you've got me wrong. I only came because I thought there was a chance that I might walk into a spot of real life. I think you've forgotten that you can get tired of facing dullness and respectability after a time. I'd like to see you hit the high spots. Then I could go back to Ebury Street with a thrill bedded down in my mind that would last me for a long time. You're on a wild-goose chase, but I hope you have a bit of luck. See that they don't eat you in that house."

"Do you mean the people, or anything else they may have in the dump?"

Nina laughed as Cardby walked away along the pavement. The detective knew only too well that he was starting on a delicate job. He could not decide which opening move would bring the best result. Finally, he made up his mind to open the game with a gamble, and then take whatever chance turned up. He raised the dirty knocker on the door, and rapped sharply. It was some little time before he heard any movement. Then feet slithered along the passage, and the door was pulled back. A wizened little man was facing the detective. His face was yellow, but a three or four days' growth of beard covered most of it. The grey hair was matted. The man wore no collar, and it was difficult to guess the colour of his shirt.

"Watcha want?" he asked in a piping voice.

"Watcha want 'ere mister?"

Mick Cardby did his best to appear somewhat agitated. He drew nearer to the man, placed a hand against the side of his mouth in the approved manner, and tried to effect what he hoped would be a dramatic whisper:

"I'm looking for a mate of mine. I think he pulled in here early this morning. I've got a bit of news for him that'll get him out of the cart he's in. Truth is, mate, that the bloke is on the run, and I can help him out. If I don't find him soon I reckon he'll have no chance at all."

Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the ruse would have failed. The fact that Cardby was well dressed would have wrecked the entire idea. Yet it happened, oddly enough, that Cardby's smartly cut suit proved to be his ace in the pack. The man examined the clothes, and looked at Cardby, said:

"Was it another toff, mister, like you? I mean, the

same sort of cove?"

"You've got it, mate" replied Cardby instantly. "A nice-looking bloke, and a very snappy dresser. Very proud sort of bloke with his clothes."

That seemed to settle the matter for the wizened

He remarked:

"You're a bit too late, matey. The bloke left here hours ago. A regular toff he was, too. I bet his clothes cost him more than beer money, mister."

Cardby's heart was beating faster. He had struck oil, even if he had arrived too late. He started working

round for another opening:

"I reckon he must have left a message behind, matey. I think he knew that I'd be coming along to give him a hand. I want to see the man who put him up. You know who I mean. No names, no pack drill. Here's a dollar. Just take me along to the bloke, and

I'll have a word with him, matey."

"Matey" looked at the money, and decided that his caller must be a millionaire. Five bob for doing nothing! He pulled back the door almost deferentially, and led the way along the dark and dirty passage. Cardby found it hard to see as they mounted the creaking stairs. There was a smell of dirt all over the house. The wizened man mounted to the second floor, and along the landing to the rear of the house. He pointed to the door, placed a significant finger across his lips, and vanished.

Mick Cardby paused for an instant outside the bedroom door. He was sure that it would not be locked not in a house of that type. He took a firm grip on the knob, turned it slowly, and then flung back the door. A man sprang from a truckle bed standing against the far wall. Cardby closed the door behind him, and waited for the man to jump. Mick could well imagine that he was facing the man Nina had seen. She had said the person was repulsive. There couldn't

be much of an argument against it.

He was tall and thin, almost emaciated. A hook nose

swerved over the sallow face, the beady eyes were set well back in their sockets, the mouth was a slit, and the lips looked bloodless. He wore a filthy shirt, a greasy pair of patched trousers, socks through which his big toes protruded, and no shoes. It seemed to Cardby that the man was swaying a little. He eyed him carefully. To a man who had spent early days in the prize ring that swaying movement could mean anything.

"Hallo, stranger," said Mick. "I thought the time had arrived for us to have a friendly talk. Sit down,

and make yourself at home. Have a smoke ? "

The man shook his head, and pressed back towards the wall. His eyes seemed to get darker, and smaller. He said nothing. Cardby knew that the man was not going to break easily. He was brimming over with suspicion.

"Nice quarters you've got here," he said, waving a hand round the almost bare bedroom, "but I couldn't imagine that they would suit my friend Robert Angel. I suppose you know that I called here to see him, eh?"

"I've never heard of him, and I reckon you've come into the wrong spot, mister. There's been nobody here

with a name like that."

Cardby was surprised. The man had the remnants of an educated voice.

"Don't try stalling," said Mick. "I know that he came here in the early hours of this morning. I know that he didn't stay very long, and I know that he has now gone. I didn't come here on any wild-goose chase. When I make a call I always know what I'm doing. If you try lying to me again you'll find that it doesn't pay. You'd better sit down while I talk to you. Pin back your ears, and get a load of this, brother.

"I want to see Robert Angel. That is why I came. I don't know that he was going to pull out so soon. Now that he has gone I want to know where he is. So this is your big moment to open up. I'm ready and

listening."

"You've got mixed up, mister. I don't know the man, and he ain't been in this room. Better try some of the other blok is living here. They might be able to

tell you a few things about him. I can't. That's the

Gospel truth."

Mick decided to force the pace. After all, he held no aces so he had nothing to lose. He drew nearer to the man as he whispered to him:

"I suppose in a minute you'll be telling me that you've never heard of a bloke named Cuthbert Kendal

either? But I wouldn't advise you to."

The man was shaken, badly shaken. Cardby took another knock before the man could recover his balance,

or think out an answer:

"The man I'm talking about, Robert Angel, has been here before now with a message for you from Cuthbert Kendal. Don't you think I know plenty? I am telling you that you're wasting your time by stalling. Come clean, man."

"I'll have one of those smokes from you," said the

man unexpectedly.

Cardby threw one across the room. He didn't intend to stand for any tricks. The man struck a loose match on the damaged wallpaper, and lit it.

"Now I'm ready to hear what you've got to say," "I know that Angel was here, so you insisted Mick.

might as well just tell me what you know."

"And supposing I tell you that even if you might be right I'm going to say nothing? There isn't much, Mr. Nobody, that you can do then."

"You'd be surprised. I could do plenty. For a start I could knock hell out of you until you decided that it'd be better to talk than lie on the floor like a battered wreck. I think that would be my first move."

"You daren't do it," announced the startled man.
There wasn't very much confidence in his voice, but he

pressed closer to the wall.

"That would be my first move," asserted Cardby, "and when you came round I'd have to decide what my next move might be. I only know that it would be much more unpleasant than the first instalment."

"No man is going to lay a finger on me. I can tell

Cardby crossed the room with three quick strides, you that much." brought the palm of his right-hand across the man's

face, and then smacked a short-armed left jab into the pit of his stomach. The breath whistled out of the man, and he started to bend at the knees. Cardby stood back and watched him fold up until his knees rested on the floor. The detective laughed, said:

"You wouldn't like it if I started to work on you

seriously, eh?"

The man could not answer for a time. His breath

had passed out.

"I'm not going to wait here all day," said Mick. "Either you talk, or you take it. Make up your mind which it is to be. I'm not very patient."

The man gazed at the tightly balled fists. He rose

to his feet, and for a second moved with bewildering speed as he crossed the room towards a derelict dressing-table. Cardby shot out a foot, and the man tripped over it. Instantly Cardby bent and struck him behind the ear as he was pitching downwards. He lay quite still. Mick backed away from him, stood with his back to the dressing-table while he fumbled through the small drawers. He found just what he had expected -a gun bedded down under a heap of clothes. It was some time before the man on the floor made a move. He was too weak to take much in the way of punishment. Mick showed him the gun, and wagged a finger almost like an admonishing teacher.

"You are through," he said. "All washed up. Have you decided to play ball with me, or do I have to give

you the entire works? Take your pick."

The man scrambled to his feet, and lurched towards the narrow truckle bed. He sat for a time without

speaking. Finally he said to Cardby:

"I reckon I'm old enough to know when all the cards are stacked against me, and that's about how I'm fixed now. You've got me well beaten, and I know it. Tell me what you want to know, but don't hit me again."

"I want to know everything you can tell me about the visit Robert Angel paid to this room. I want to know how he came, what he said, and how and why he left. You can make a start with those few questions but I am warning you that I know the answers to most of 'em myself, and if I find that you're trying to stall again I'll knock your face through to the back of your head. So far I've been playing with you. Now the game is all over, and I'm getting serious. Well, go ahead, and see if you can manage to talk truthfully. It will save you a shellacking if you do. I'm waiting."

"I can tell you, mister, that I'd got no idea he was coming here at all. I got the shock of my life when he

turned up. I didn't expect him."

"For once I am sure that you are telling me the truth, because I know that part of it myself. Before we go any further, what's your name?"

"Alan Mount. And maybe you'll tell me what your

name might be."

"Maybe I wouldn't. You'll discover it before long.

Get on with the tale." "The bloke who owns this kip told me that a man had called to see me. I was in bed. Blimey, it must have been about four o'clock in the morning. I didn't know much about the bloke, but I had seen him before. He said he was on the run, and wanted to settle down in my room for the night. I said he could have my bed, and I asked him what trouble he was in. The bloke only said that he'd had a word with the Boss about it. I knew then that I'd be in the cart with the Boss if I didn't take him in."
"Wait one moment, Mount. When you talk about

the Boss, you mean Kendal?" "Of course I mean Kendal. Who else would I mean? Well, the bloke got down on the bed, and he couldn't sleep. I could see as plain as a pikestaff that he had got the jitters. I started getting a bit nervy as well. I reckoned he was on the run after doing a killing, and I didn't want to be tied up with anything like that. I kept asking him what had happened, but he wouldn't open up at all. He just stayed dumb, and kept biting his finger nails. Blimey, every time a train went past on the line at the back he was jumping off the bed. It got on my nerves, mister."

"Did he tell you that the Boss had sent him along

to you here?"

"No, he didn't. He only said that he had spoken to

the Boss. I couldn't quite work out what he meant, but since the Boss was in the party I wasn't going to start any argument. It doesn't pay with the Boss, mister."

"I've heard that said before, too. All right, now we're getting places. I don't want to interrupt you if I can help it. I'd rather you told me everything you know in your own way. Get along again, Mount."

"Well, I don't think he was here for more than a couple of hours. Then I got a proper shock. The Boss himself arrived here. You could have knocked me down with a blooming feather. He didn't often come along here himself. Why, I hadn't seen him at all for months and months. The Boss told me to put my shoes on, and walk round the houses for a few minutes. He said he wanted to talk to the other bloke. I told you I never try to argue with the Boss. I trailed up and down the street for maybe half an hour, and then 1 came back again. The young bloke was still very jittery, but the Boss was as cool and calm as ever. I never knew him any other way. The Boss said he was going to take his friend with him. He said he could find a safe place for him. The Boss handed me a couple of quid, and the two of 'em walked out of the place. That's the Gospel truth, and there's nothing else that happened. I can't tell you any more, mister."

"I think you can tell me some more, Mount, and that means that I'll have to ask you a few questions. When they left here had you got any idea where they might be going to?"

"How could I know, mister? I wasn't here when

they were talking, was I?"

"No, but you know quite a bit about the Boss, and you must know more than somewhat about his hide-

outs. So what would you suggest, Mount?"

"The Boss is too deep for me to know much about him, mister. There isn't a man in this world who can say that he knows much about the Boss, or about what he does, or where he lives. I only know the little place he's got at Islington, but I don't know of any other

place. I shouldn't think for a minute that they'd go

The Boss was very particular about it."

Mick Cardby pulled out an envelope and tore off the Then he passed it to the man with a pencil, and ordered him abruptly:

"Write down that address for me. I might be able

to pick him up there."

The man hesitated momentarily, until he saw the balled fists again, and the gleam in Cardby's eyes. scribbled on the envelope, and handed it back. Cardby glanced at it, and then slid it into his pocket.

"How often have you been meeting Cuthbert Kendal,

Mount?" he inquired.

"I told you, mister, that until a few hours ago I hadn't set my eyes on him for months and months. He came up here then for me to do a small job for him, and I saw him a few hours after I'd done the job. The next time I saw him was a few hours ago. I'm not trying to kid you a bit, mister."

"That's just as well for you. I see-ah-what was the small job you did for the Boss a few months ago? It doesn't matter very much, but I'd like to know. Most of the things done by your Boss have an interest."

"Oh, he wanted me to take a message to a fellow.

That was all. It was easy."

"That's the way to collect your money. Who was the man, and what was the message? You ought to be able to remember that without very much effort."

"There's every reason why I remember it, mister, because the bloke I gave the message to never got

another message from anybody afterwards."

"This sounds a very mysterious set-up, Mount. Start

explaining a bit."

"I had to tell a little runt named Ernie Pace that the Boss wanted to see him at Islington. Ernie only

lived at Stepney. I gave the message."

Mick Cardby swallowed hard, and his heart beat faster. He hoped the man did not notice the sudden wave of excitement. The detective made an effort to appear casual as he pressed the next question:

"And why did Ernie Pace never get any more

messages from any one?"

"A private split named Mick Cardby murdered him the same night while he was on a job. The Boss told me about it. The split found him on the job, and let him have it. And Ernie wasn't a bad little bloke."

# CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

## WHERE IS ROBERT ANGEL?

CARDBY pulled out a packet of cigarettes, and threw one over to Alan Mount. He badly required time in which to think. The gods of luck had sent him a funny present. He had missed what he sought, and found something better. He was in no hurry as he stared at the man, and asked him:

"How did the Boss come to tell you the story of the killing of Ernie Pace? It wouldn't be like him to

start talking much to you, would it?"

"He came here that night-in the early hours. could see he was a bit ruffled, and that wasn't like him a bit. I asked him if there'd been some trouble. He said there'd been plenty of trouble. He had sent Ernie Pace on a job, and Ernie had bungled it. He'd been caught red-handed by Mick Cardby, the private split, and decided that he might as well shoot it out. It seems the pair of 'em had a gun battle, and Ernie got the bad end of the stick. He finished up as a corpse, and the split got away. I'd say that was the truth, mister, and I'll tell you why. The police never bothered themselves about that case. They didn't want the bloke who had murdered Ernie Pace. And why? Because they knew damned well that this Cardby bloke was the gunman. He's in as thick as thieves with the splits at the Yard, and they'd never run him in for anything like that. Not them!"

Mick restrained his smile with an effort. The explanation was novel, and amusing. But Alan Mount was

intensely serious as he made the declaration.

"I wonder why the Boss took the trouble to tell you all that?" said Mick. He was asking himself as much

as he asked the other man. "He must have had some idea at the back of his mind when he spoke to you about it. Can you think of any answer that might sound sensible?"

The reply was entirely unexpected. In the first place, Mick Cardby had not expected an answer. In the second place, the reply taught him plenty about Mr. Cuthbert Kendal, and revealed some of the man's mental depths.

"I can soon tell you why he talked to me about it, Mister," said Alan Mount. "He knew that Ernie Pace was a pal of mine. That's why he got me to take the message. He knew that I could find Ernie when another bloke would never have a chance. Well, he talked to me about this lousy split, and said it amounted to shooting Ernie down in cold blood. He said Mick Cardby ought to have a bullet drilled between his eyes, and I said I reckoned it would be a good idea. The Boss said: 'How'd you like to get your own back for the killing of Ernie, Alan?' and I told him that men like Cardby didn't deserve to live. Do you know what he did, mister? He handed me the gun you've got in your hand this very minute, and he said that if I'd make a real job of Cardby he'd put me on easy street for life by giving me a thousand quid. Now what do you think about that?"

The detective thought so much about it that for a considerable time he passed no comment. His eyes narrowed as he looked at the gun in his hand. Yet he sounded almost uninterested as he said to Alan Mount:

"That was a most unusual offer, and the money involved was heavy metal. What sort of reply did you

give to the Boss? I'm curious to know."

"I took the gun, and said that if I ever had a chance of taking a crack at Mick Cardby I would. He said that if I'd like to do the job he could soon find a few ways of taking a crack at the split. I told him that I'd think it over. I don't think he was very pleased about that. In any case, he came nowhere near me, as I told you, until a few hours ago."

"I see, Mount. Well, it has been a most enjoyable

talk, and now the time has arrived for you to clamber

into some clothes. We're going places."

"But you're only wasting your time taking me anywhere, mister. There isn't anything else I can tell you. Since you've got all you want to know, all I can tell you, why not leave me here in a bit of peace?"

"I'm taking you from here, Mount, because I want

to keep you alive."

"Keep me alive? But I couldn't be safer than I am here, could I? Don't start trying to move me, mister. If there is trouble about I'm better off here than I would be in any other place I know of. I'm staying put."

"I'm taking you with me," insisted Cardby, "because I'm certain that if you remain in this room you stand

a damned good chance of being killed."

"That's lunatic's talk, mister. Who do you suppose

would murder me?"

"Your own Boss," replied Cardby evenly. "I'm only astonished that you have managed to live for so long. The fact that you're alive only goes to demonstrate to me that even the great Cuthbert Kendal can make bad mistakes. Certainly he's made a damned bad error this time, Mount."

"You say that my own Boss would murder me,

mister? You must be mad."

"What I've just said is the sanest talk you've ever

heard in your life."

"But I've done nothing to upset him, mister. I've always got along in a swell way with the Boss. Why

on earth should he want to murder me?"

"For exactly the same reason that he put an end to Ernie Pace. Your Boss was frightened. He thought that Ernie would talk, and would put the touch on him. So he murdered Ernie Pace. You are the only other person who could put the finger on him. I'm staggered to find that you know what you do, and still manage to live. Get into your clothes, and let's get going."

Alan Mount slumped back again on the edge of the

Alan Mount slumped back again on the edge of the bed. He passed a weary hand across his forehead, and sat muttering to himself. Then he rose slowly to his fleet, and walked over until he stood not more

than a yard away from Cardby. He stared into the detective's eyes, asked:

"Mister, would you mind telling me just who you

might be ?"

"I am Mick Cardby, the man who is supposed to have shot Ernie Pace."

Alan Mount placed his hands over his face, and reeled back across the room. The man looked as though he were out on his feet. Cardby gave him a couple of minutes in which to recover from the shock before he said:

"Now that you know the way the dice are loaded you'd better get into your clothes. I'm going to take you to a police station, Mount, where they will see that you are all right, where they'll see that Cuthbert Kendal can't rub you out. Now don't start to argue. The deal I'm giving you is absolutely on the up-and-up. You are not going to be charged with any offence whatever. That is a promise. You are not being taken to the police station as an offender. I am taking you along as a vital witness in a murder case who is imperatively in need of police protection."

"Is that true, Mr. Cardby? You mean that I'm not going to be charged?"

"I give you my word. Let me put it in another way, and we will leave out altogether the matter of Ernie Pace. If your Boss had a slight idea that Mick Cardby had called here, and that you had spoken to him, your life wouldn't be worth a bad tomato. Can you see the sense in that?"

"I'm not altogether a fool," muttered Alan Mount, and he commenced to put on what few clothes he had got. Within five minutes he had tied a few belongings into a pathetic bundle, and was ready for the move. Mick led the way to the car. Nina's eyes glistened when she saw that Cardby had a man in tow. Mick

handed out a few instructions to her.

"Nina, I want to sit with this man at the back of the car. Would you very much mind driving? Thanks a lot. And I want you to make your first stop at Cannon Row Police Station. I don't mind if you hurry a bit."

Mount shivered when he heard "Cannon Row" mentioned. Mostly, old lags do! They know it only too well as the official station attached to the Yard. And he had not ceased trembling when they arrived in the

yard.

Mick handed over Alan Mount to a senior officer, asked that the man should be given a good meal instead of being placed in a cell, pointed out that the man had not been brought in on any charge, and explained that when Inspector Swale arrived at the Yard everything would be made quite clear. It did not take Swale very long to make the journey. There was every reason why he should hurry. Cardby had informed him over the line that he had cracked the Ernie Pace murder for him. Swale and the senior officer listened to Mick for about half an hour without any attempt to interrupt. Swale sat with his mouth wide open most of the time.

"Now you can see what a cunning devil you are looking for," said Mick, after he had given all the details. "He wanted this man, Alan Mount, to move me from the scene. That would have brought him great joy. But he went a step further than that, Swaley, by trying to stage a diabolically clever trick. When the experts have tested this gun I'll bet that the bullet found in Pace's head was fired from it. So what? Just that if the man Mount had murdered me the bullet would have been found identical with that used on Pace. And wouldn't that have made confusion most foul for the police? Why, it would have given you all a headache for years!"

"From what you have said, Mick," announced Swale, "it seems that we've only got to arrest the person,

Cuthbert Kendal, and the case is closed."

"I don't like your use of the word 'only,' Swaley. You don't know this bloke Kendal. I do. He's the hardest crock we've had in London for years and years. If you start hunting for him, and you have the thought in your mind that it is a routine job, you'll end up with a nice row of policemen and detectives on the mortuary slab. He isn't dangerous. He is deadly. Well, boys, I've done my job. Now I'll introduce you to

Alan Mount, Swaley, and I want you to give him a big hand. By the time the judge and jury have heard his statement about the message to Ernie Pace, the conversation he had with Kendal, and he has told the story about the gun handed over to him by his Boss, it'll be time for Kendal to start smelling lilies. Come this way, and meet your star witness."

It was not long before Mick came out again to his

car. He said:

"Nina, you've been a riotous success. My congratulations. What about a quick drink to celebrate the day before I drive you to Ebury Street?"

They celebrated and parted. Mick drove at last to the office. He found his father pacing around in a room

full of smoke. He shouted out:

"What the hell have you been doing, Mick? You've nearly been sending me scatty. I've been expecting the police or a hospital to ring me at any moment. I don't think you've played a very fair trick on me, young man."

"Maybe not, Dad, but it all finished up by being well worth it. Stoke up your pipe again, and let me give you the latest batch of news. I really have tumbled head first into a packet of good luck. It started like ..."

Mick was weary of the story long before he reached the conclusion. He was cursing himself as a fool for not having called his father to the Yard. When he concluded his father rose, and shook him by the hand, said:

"A very neat job, Mick. Hell, you must have a glib tongue to have got a tale like that out of a tough guy.

How on earth did you manage it?"

"My tongue wasn't all I used," replied Mick, inno-cently. He changed his tone when he continued:

"Now you can see at once, Dad, that the whole set-up has changed entirely. I can go ahead now without any further worries. At last, I can take a real crack at Cuthbert Kendal."

"I haven't quite followed you at the moment, Mick. It is true that the business at Shadwell has given the case a new twist, but I can't see that the position now is so vitally different. Better start explaining to me."

"Lordy, Dad, I thought you'd have jumped on the essential with the very first leap. Look! I wanted to get Robert Angel first because I had no evidence against Kendal in connection with the Castor Club. so far as that business is concerned, Kendal is in the clear unless Angel put in a large-sized squeal. You'll agree with me that that is so, won't you?"

"Surely; and I can't see that there is any great change. You still are without the evidence to fasten

the club case on Cuthbert Kendal."

"The whole point, Dad," said Mick slowly, "is that I have got no further interest in the Castor Club case! We know that Kendal pulled all the strings in that case. We know that once he is moved from the scene our client can live happily ever after. So we draw our money. All right. Now move another stage, and where are you? I have got the real goods on the great Kendal now for the Ernie Pace killing. For that crime he is sure to take the long drop. And for evidence against him I no longer require the services of Robert Angel. I want Cuthbert Kendal for the murder of Ernie Pace, and for nothing else. They can only hang him once, and that severs all our connections with the man, or with anything he has done."
"Well thought out, Mick. So you no longer want

Robert Angel?"

"I most certainly do want him! I'm getting the Metropolitan Police to throw out a proper dragnet for him. In the first place, I must find him so that he can give me a slight indication of where I might find Kendal, and, in the second place, I want him with regard to the poor girl in the hospital. I'll ring the police now, and I'd like the newspapers to get the full story. I want everyone to start asking: 'Where is Robert Angel?' Wait a moment while I start the ball rolling, Dad."

Mick was on the line for nearly twenty minutes. He seemed satisfied when he had made the last call. His

father still frowned as he said:

"Mick, you are still mystifying me. You know that we have nothing on Kendal about the affair at the Castor Ciab. He doesn't know that you have collected

Alan Mount, and taken a statement from him. Then why the hell should you be so certain that he is on the run? I can't see any reason at this moment why he should be running. He's got an office, and he's got a home. So why not make the obvious move and discover whether he is at either of them? That man, Mick, still believes that he is in the clear."

"I've thought of that, and I'd like to think that you're right, but I'm afraid it is a bit too much of a fond hope, Dad. I'll try them both, but I'll be staggered if I find him at either place. I'll bet that after he talked to Robert Angel early this morning he could see the red danger lamp a mile away. Kendal has been bred to smell trouble. Do you think he is the sort who

would sit tight until the trouble crashed in on him ?" "All the same, Mick, I think we should try the home and the office before we do anything else. What about

making a start right away?"

"That suits me, Dad. I'm sure you'll find that my

guess is about right."

Mick had his hand in his right-hand pocket when they entered the offices in Cheapside. The same two girls were still hovering about. Before Cardby could pass through to the inner room one of the girls said :

"Mr. Kendal has not arrived, sir, and he won't be here today. I rang his home, and Mrs. Kendal says he

has left London on a short business trip."

"Thanks a lot. When he comes in tell him Mr.

Cardby might call again."

The girl most formally asserted that she would convey the message. They left the building with a smile, and headed right away for Kendal's home at Hampstead. It was an unostentatious house. Zena Kendal answered their knock. Mick looked at her with some interest. She was a nondescript blonde, and her eyes were a watery blue. The skin was a little blotchy, and she had fought a losing battle with wispy fair hair. Mick felt sorry for the woman as she faced them in the doorway. He asked gently:

"Is your husband at home, Mrs. Kendal? We wish

to see him for a moment."

"No, he isn't here," she replied. Her voice was a

flat monotone. "I don't expect him back for a few days. He was compelled earlier today to take a sudden business trip. I believe he has gone up to the Midlands."

"Perhaps you could guess the length of his stay from the amount of luggage he took, Mrs. Kendal? What would you say about that?"

"Oh, he took his usual travelling case. He always keeps that packed. I wouldn't say that he would be away for longer than usual. Is there any message you would care to leave for him, gentlemen?"

"No, thanks. We are only sorry that we should

have troubled you, madam."

The men salaamed and beat a retreat. It was the

father who said:

"What a damned shame! He's taken that poor little woman right up the garden path. Mick, the shock she has got coming to her will just about see her into the grave. Kendal must be a bit more than a good actor, eh?"

Mick was silent for a time. At Camden Town he

stopped the car.

"Would you very much mind taking a taxi from here, Dad?" he asked. "I've got another call to make, and I think it would be more effective if I made it alone.

I'll get along to the office as soon as I can."

"You pitched me that story once before. Now it doesn't go down any too well. Still, have it your own way. The old man will now lash out money on unnecessary cabs. You wouldn't think me impertinent if I asked where you were going to, Mick? After all, I am a partner in the firm, you know."

"I am going to see a man about several hundred dogs. I thought of buying a few score of them to keep me awake at nights. Buy yourself a gallon of beer, Dad, before you start searching for a taxi."

Mick paused once on his way. He entered a saloon bar, and sat for a brief spell with a pint of bitter before him. He wanted to work things out a little. Then he finished the beer, and cleared out of the pub.

He started the car, swung the wheel round. Cardby

was heading for an address in Islington!

Mick was whistling cheerfully. He believed that his run of luck would still hold. And he was most anxious to meet the great Cuthbert Kendal!

# CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### UNHAPPY ENDING

MICK parked his car a hundred yards away from the address he wanted. And he was in no hurry to walk the short distance. He had reached a stage in the play when any mistake might well prove fatal. He even walked past the small house once before deciding to knock on the door. Immediately the door was opened he knew that something was badly wrong. A burly man stood facing him, his sleeves rolled up, his eyes gleaming with animosity. Mick began to wonder what he had done that could be wrong. The layout was not what he had expected. The man continued to glare at

"Thanks for the friendly greeting," said Mick. "I've called to see a man who has a room here. I believe that the name is Cuthbert Kendal, but I am not at all sure that he passes under that name in this house. I'll describe him to you, and then you can tell me

whether I'm right or not."

"You're not!" snapped the man, and started to close

Cardby placed his shoulder against the door, and the door. pushed a little. Then he placed his foot inside the hall.

The burly man bellowed at him:

"I reckon you're the person they call Mick Cardby,

"That's the name," Mick felt elated. There could not aren't you?" be any further doubt about it. He had called at the right house. But he was facing the wrong man. Cardby frowned, could not understand what on earth was wrong with the person. "That's the name," he repeated. "I didn't know until I saw your face that there was something wrong with it. Perhaps you'd tell me

why you want me to have it changed? I've got along with it very nicely until now, but it seems to have a pretty bad effect on you."

"I don't want your sort skulking round here," snarled the man, "and you'd better get out of the place before

I decide to hurt you a bit."

"You ought to be a professional host," commented Cardby. "I reckon the guests would take to you in a big way. Candidly, I find your style a bit too unorthodox to suit me. Would you mind if I step inside the mansion?"

"You can try all your fancy talk, mister, but you are not putting a foot inside this house, and that's final. If you try any funny business I'll bash your face in. Now start moving before I get really annoyed."

"I take it that the kindly gentleman I referred to gave you your instructions about the art of polite

doorkeeping?"

"That's got nothing whatever to do with you. I'm pleasing myself what I do, and I'm telling you for the

last time to get off that doorstep."
"Let's both be a bit belligerent, shall we?" asked Cardby, and he was not smiling. Very much the contrary. "You want me to move. I agree that I'm going to move-but not the way you wish me to move. I am coming inside that house here and now, and if you fancy your chance about stopping me, you can make a start, and I wish you the best of luck. Here we go ! "

He crashed into the door with his shoulder so violently that the burly man was flung back a yard along the narrow passage. The man shook his head, lowered it, and then charged. He was snorting like a bull as he made the rush. Cardby stared at him for a fraction

of a second, and said:

"You damned foolish man! Take this and tell me

how you like it."

The man had bent his head really low as he charged. Mick Cardby moved slightly to one side, and lashed upwards with his knee. He winced with pain as he struck the man flush in the face. The head was jerked back, and the sight was not pretty. Blood was spurting all over the passage from the smashed face. Cardby was taking no chances. As the man reeled backwards he planted a fist almost wrist deep in the pit of the man's stomach. Mick was certain that the fight had ended. He was wrong. The burly man was as tough as they come. He could do more than take it. He came back with another rush in an attempt to start giving some!

Cardby wished that he had time to slide out a blackjack. But the man was crowding him. It was not that Mick objected to using his fists. He wanted the blackjack to make certain of ending the fracas as quickly as possible. They were making too much noise. Soon everybody in the house would be joining in. And the last thing Mick Cardby wanted in that house was a free-for-all fight. It would waste too much precious

time.

He held the man off by crashing a straight left into the bloody face, and followed with a right cross to the heart. The man sounded like a wounded animal, and came back at once for some more. Footsteps were now sounding from the stairs. Cardby swore, and tore into the man with both hands. The man flung his arms round Mick's waist and tried to lift him. Cardby checked the move by cracking the bloke under the jaw with his elbow. The grip eased, but the man flung himself at Cardby, and Mick found himself pressed against the wall. The big man's weight was beginning to tell. Cardby had an idea that the man was probably a professional wrestler. He certainly knew how to hold. Mick looked over the huge shoulder, and saw two other men staring at them.

"Help me chuck this dirty bastard out of here!"

yelled the big man.

Mick thought quickly. In the narrow space of the passage the three of them could pin him down so that he'd have no room to manœuvre, no space in which to use his fists, or his feet. Something had to be done quickly before the reinforcements could take a hand. The big man had his chin on Cardby's shoulder, and was trying to bend him back against the wall. Mick dropped suddenly, dropped until he was almost on his knees.

The man lost his grip, and his head went forward into the wall. The detective jerked himself erect again. His head arrived with a terrific crash into the man's face. Cardby felt numbed for a moment, but he wasted Before the man could straighten himself Cardby landed a full-blooded punch into the throat, smacked home one to the stomach, and followed with a vicious uppercut that rocked the man back on his heels. He was still tottering when Cardby balanced himself, moved forward, and lashed out with his foot. The toe of his shoe arrived exactly where Mick had aimed for-right in the solar plexus. The colossus commenced to collapse.

Cardby helped him on his way with a straight right to the chin, and the big man tumbled back among the other two men. By the time they had straightened themselves out they found themselves facing a different adversary. The detective was holding a gun in his hand.

"I haven't got this with me as a toy," he said, "and if any of you try pulling a fast one, I'll use it. Now, mister, when you've got a bit of breath back in your body perhaps you'll tell me what started all this song and dance. I don't pretend to understand the first thing about it. I have never been to this house before, and I've never set eyes on any of you before. So what caused you to start this riot, you big mountain?"

The man was busily engaged in using his coat sleeve to wipe the mass of blood from his face. He was panting with the fervour of a walrus. The other men looked at Cardby, stared at the gun in his hand, and said nothing. Mick was beginning to lose his temper rapidly. His nerves were getting frayed, and he waved

the gun ominously as he said:

"Either you talk or you get hurt. I don't give a damn which it is. One of you start talking, or they'll

have to carry you out of this dump."
"I wouldn't have done it, mister," mumbled the big man, "if he hadn't told me such a tale about you. That's what made me do it, mister."

"All of which means nothing to me. Let's be hear-

ing some more, Samson."

"He said you'd been chasing after him for months,

and that you'd been a real nuisance. Then he said you'd even broken into his house and started going through the drawers to try and get some evidence against him. He said, too, that you had done the same thing at his office. The man said he couldn't call his life his own with you badgering him all the time. And he said he hadn't done anything at all, mister."

"And I don't believe for one second that even now you are giving me the full story. What really made

you start that attack on me, Goliath?"

"He said you might even try to start the same game here," said the big man a bit sheepishly. "I told him that you ought to get thrown out. He gave me a fiver, and said that if you called I was to knock hell out of you. He said it would suit him better if you never got out of here alive. Well, a fiver is a fiver, mister, and I told him that I'd muss you up plenty if you came round here. Now you know all the truth about it."

"I think I do. I only hope for your sake that you're not lying. What I want to know now is where in this

house do I find this man."

"I can't tell you that," said the big man. "He left here a while ago, and said he'd be coming back, but I haven't seen him since. I dunno where he is, mister. Do either of you two know where he went to?"

They shook their heads emphatically. Cardby turned

to the pair of them.

"You've heard what the big boy has got to say about things. Now I'm waiting to hear what you can add to it. How do you pair fit into this picture? Did he talk to you about me? What did you intend to do to me?"

"He told both of us the same sort of tale he told Big Sam," replied one of the men. "I didn't know very much about him. He was a funny bird, and we didn't see much of him. He only came maybe once a month, and you never knew when he was coming, and when he was going. Sometimes he'd stay here for two or three days, and sometimes he'd call for half an hour. I never could make top nor tail of him, and that's a fact, mister. He used to give me the creeps every time he started looking at me."

"You can, at any rate, tell me how long ago it is since he left here."

"I reckon I can," said Big Sam. "It must be a matter of three hours ago. I don't reckon I'd be far

out. I'm going to wash this muck off my face."
"You're not—yet. Did he say anything to you about where he was going, or when he might be coming

back? He means plenty to me."

"He said he'd be coming back," said Big Sam, "but he didn't say a word about where he was going. He'd rather cut his throat than talk about any such thing to anyone. He was the tightest bloke with his trap I've ever met. Once I asked him what his line of business was, and he glared at me, and told me men had been murdered for asking questions like that."

"All right. I reckon the best thing for me to do now is to take a look at his room. He was right when he said that I'd probably want to prowl round in it. I do. But it so happens that I'm a detective, and the man is badly wanted for something as serious as anything can be. That makes it very likely, doesn't it, that I should want to take a look around?"

"Blimey O'Reilly!" exclaimed Big Sam. "I knew there was something a bit fishy about the bloke, but I didn't know he was wanted as bad as that."

"Well, he is. Now show me which is his room, and then you can wash the blood from your face. There's

no need for you two others to follow us."

Big Sam lumbered up the stairs, led the way until he stopped outside a closed door. He pointed with his

finger. The door was locked.

"There must be a duplicate key to this room," said Mick, "and I'm sure the landlord, or the landlady, will have it. Would you mind getting it for me? You know the people, and I don't. I'll wait here for you."

"You're all wrong, mister," said Big Sam. "There's no need for me to ask anybody about it. The missus told me hat he asked if there was another key to his room, and he said he'd never rent a room unless he had the only key. He wouldn't let her clean the place unless he was there."

"That's a pity. Never mind, Samson, you've got

seventeen stone of bone and muscle. Throw your shoulder into the door, and I'll give you a dollar when you open it. Don't be nervous. I'll pay the woman for the busted lock."

The door was not built to stand the impact of men like Big Sam. At the first assault the lock was forced,

and the door swung back.

Mick Cardby stepped forward and looked inside the room. He shook his head wearily, and felt for his packet of cigarettes. He needed them.

Constance Wheeler would never be repaid for her

injuries!

In the far corner of the room was a small iron bedstead. Stretched out across the top of the bed was the still form of Robert Angel!

His throat had been cut from ear to ear. The head was lolling backwards. Beneath the head a great pool

of blood had formed on the carpet.

Big Sam, the toughest man in Islington, passed out in a dead faint!

#### CHAPTER NINETEEN

#### SEARCHING FOR A LEAD

MICK CARDBY walked across the floor, and took a closer look at Robert Angel. The wound had been inflicted with maniacal savagery. He could hardly believe that a man of Kendal's build would have had enough power to wield a razor so brutally. It was obvious that the outcry would have been almost nil. He opened the wardrobe. A few oddments in the way of clothes had been left behind, and there were four or five soiled collars on the dressing table. That was all. Cuthbert Kendal had made a neat clearance before he faded out. The corpse was about the only clue, and that did not seem helpful.

Cardby took a jug of water from the washstand and emptied it over Big Sam's face. The huge bulk quivered, and then came slowly to life. He sat up, took another quick glance at the corpse, and started for the door with remarkable speed for a man of his bulk. Cardby quickly called him back.

"Say nothing to anyone in the house, but get a policeman to come up here at once. Tell him that

there's been a sudden death. I'll talk to him."

It was more than an hour before Mick Cardby left the house. By then the Yard men were in possession, and Mick was free to roam. He called at the office to relate the sad story to his father. The men were miserable.

"It is going to be one helluva job finding Cuthbert Kendal. The man is as cunning as they are made. you know, Dad, that he even wiped the handle and blade of the razor on a face towel before he left? The man who can stand at the side of a corpse and do that is a bloke who will do everything according to plan.

That's what makes it look difficult."

"Don't worry too much, Mick. The cleverest men make mistakes, and you'll usually discover that the cleverer a man is the more gigantic will be the blunder he makes. They end up by getting so much selfconfidence that it runs away with them. I'm prepared to bet that when you get a real lead on Cuthbert Kendal you'll find that he has made a damned silly mistake. Got any bright ideas about making a start, Mick ?"

"No. I think they ought to turn their experts loose from the Yard to go over the man's office, and his home, with a fine comb. However careful he may have been, he must have left something behind to tell a tale."

"Let's get along to the Yard and see what they've got to say about it."

Their conference at the headquarters lasted for nearly two hours. The Chief Constable pointed out to the father and son that they knew more about Kendal than any of the members of the official forces, since the man had never been in their hands, and his conduct had never even been investigated. He thought it only right, although they were unofficial detectives, that they should lend every aid to the police by taking a leading part in the investigation. The Chief hinted that he would be

prepared to follow any plan of campaign devised by them.

"We want Kendal for a couple of murders," he said, "and I don't care a damn what methods you use-I'll

back you to the limit."

"Then make a start by sending a senior officer and a couple of bright juniors along to the man's house," suggested Mick. "I told my father that the man must have left something behind. Get a check made on his banking accounts—private and business. I'd say that Kendal made a packet of money, and he isn't the type to start on the lam without it. Wherever the man has drifted to, he'd see to it that his pocket was well lined. Apart from the Yard men, I think you ought to make full use of the laboratories at Nottingham, and at the Hendon Police College. Those boys in the labs can tell you plenty about a piece of paper that the eye can't see. Any curious article of any sort should be sent to them at once. What does it matter if you come a hundred flops so long as the hundred-and-first attempt hits the target? Tell the men to search the place as though they were looking for a gramme of lost radium. While they do that I'll get along with my father to the offices in Cheapside. I'd like you to lend us a keeneyed man, and then we'll start a search there-a real search."

"I'm with you all the way," said the Chief, "and the sooner you make a start the better it will suit me. Take your pick of the men, and I'll make all the arrangements for the searching of the house."

An hour later the two girls in Kendal's office were amazed to see the three men stride into the room.

Sergeant Parker of the Yard told them :

"We have come to search everything in these offices. Your employer is very much wanted by the police. girls will have to remain here until we have finished in case we require any information from you. If there are any callers just let them in. We can hear what is being said. Don't stand there like a couple of dummies. Act as though you might be alive."

The arduous search commenced. There were hundreds of documents, letters and circulars. Mick

Cardby did not pay a great deal of attention to them.

"All that stuff," he declared, "made the front for his dummy business. I want to find something that isn't

a fake. Carry on with the good work."

Hour by hour the search went on, and consultation after consultation took place each time any item of apparent interest was found. At times Mick telephoned to the Yard for a messenger, and an article was sent on its way to the Hendon laboratories. The accumulated stuff in the office began to thin out. But they still had hours of work before them. The two girls were called in each time a doubt arose. Then the men stopped for a smoke. Their backs were aching, and the strain began to tell on their eyes.

"I'm still certain that he left something behind," remarked the father. "If we don't find it here, the

men working on the house should find it."

"A little optimism is a useful asset," said Sergeant Parker, "but I haven't set my eyes on anything as yet

that's likely to give me hopes."

It was in the middle of the afternoon that Mick Cardby noticed the ash tray standing on a small table in the corner of the room. He stared at it for a time. The sight was not very encouraging. The tray contained two cigarette stubs, three used matches, and a fragment of partially burnt paper. Mick took a glass from his pocket, and examined the small pile. The paper was not entirely destroyed, but the bottom half was ragged where the burnt fragment had dropped off, and the top half was so discoloured that nothing could be seen upon it. The father and the Yard man noticed that he was using the glass, and passed over to him.

"What've you found this time, Sherlock?" inquired

the father.

Mick pointed at the charred piece of paper. Parker borrowed the glass from him, and scrutinised it for a few seconds. Then he declared:

"That's no good at all, Mick. Nobody could read what used to be on that bit of paper. The printing has been completely obliterated."

"I'm not quite so certain that you're right. In any event, it is the most promising thing we've found so

far. A man placed in Kendal's position doesn't take the trouble to destroy a fragment of paper like that unless he had every reason to want it out of the way. I know the bottom part of it has gone entirely, but things can be done with the top half."

"I'd like to meet the man," said his father, "who could tell you what was printed on it—if anything ever was printed on it. Mick, I'm sorry, but you're so eager that you're putting your money on an impossibility."

"Wait for a while, and we'll see who is right. I'm ringing the people at Hendon myself, and by the time I've arranged things with them we'll see who turns out to be right. Carry on with the good work while I make the call. I know one or two tricks with bits of paper just like that one."

He made the call to Hendon, waited for a while, and then contacted the principal. Mick was anxious to

make his desires plainly known:

"This is Mick Cardby," he said. "You have been asked to give me all the help you can. Now I am asking for some real help. I have found a charred piece of paper. It may, or may not, have an important bearing upon the case we're investigating. I think it has. The fact is that I'm afraid to move it myself, and I'd like one of your experts to tackle the job. If there is printing on that paper you can raise it with a fluoroscope. I don't know whether it would be better to do the work here or to move the fragment to Hendon. Perhaps you'll make an inquiry among the staff, and then let me know what your experts have to say about it. Thanks."

When he replaced the receiver he found his father and Parker by his side. They were plainly puzzled. It

was the Yard man who asked Mick:

"What is this fluoroscope you're talking about, Mick

-a magic eye?"

"Oddly enough, Parker, you're not very far wrong. It is a black light camera. The contraption is really uncanny. It can take photographs through solid matter, and it can take photographs of things invisible to the naked eye. That's why I'd like to know what it could tell us about the bit of paper. I'm not going

into technical details now. Roughly, what happens is this: There are light rays at each end of the spectrum. They are called short waves, and are invisible to the naked eye. They can pass through solid matter quite easily. Well, the fluoroscope uses those short waves from the two extremes of the spectrum. Now we'll

It was not long before the telephone bell jangled. A message came to Mick from Hendon. An expert was already on his way. He would see that the paper was safely removed. The other two were still grinning when Mick returned to his scrutiny of the pile of documents on the desk. A pile of useless material was on the floor, and a few "possibles" rested in an open drawer on the deck. They were nearing the end of their task when the man from Hendon arrived. He examined the fragment, and stated at once:

"If there is any writing, or any printing, on that piece of paper, I can raise it for you. I'll take it with me, and let you have a report in due course. Do you want me to report directly to the Yard, Mr.

Cardby ?"

start work again."

"Thank you, but I don't want the report 'in due course.' I want it as quickly as you can let me have it. I'll tell you what we are after, sir. The man who burnt that paper has committed two murders, and he is on the run. Now you know why speed is so essential. I will arrive at the Yard in about an hour. I will probably remain there for another three hours. How would it be if you gave me a ring during that period. sir?"

"I will do that with pleasure, Mr. Cardby. I only hope that my services will be of some use to you. I

must congratulate you on your knowledge."

Mick did not take much notice of the compliment. He was reaching the end of his stack of papers, and he wanted to finish the job. It was about five o'clock when the men straightened up. The father shook his head.

"It has been a weary business," he said, "and I don't see that it has got us very far. Let's bet on your bit of burnt paper, Mick!"

"I wouldn't like to be left with that as my only

clue," said Parker.

Mick said nothing. He had been guyed for an hour by both men about his scientific accomplishments, and he was growing tired of the banter. They told the girls that they could leave the office, and informed them that little was to be gained by returning. Then they took their names and addresses—and the keys of the office. After they had locked up, the trio returned wearily to the Yard. The four men working on the house at Hampstead had not yet finished. The Chief Constable was waiting anxiously for them to return. Cardby senior gave him a report of their search, and of their probable failure. He did not forget to crack a joke about the fragment of burnt paper. The Chief was not amused. He congratulated Mick on making a most astute move. The men sat back and talked and smoked.

Time began to drag heavily. They made a couple of trips to the canteen. Even that did not seem to bring much solace to them.

"Have you worked out," asked the Chief, "whether Kendal would have been likely to clear off out of the country? I'm wondering whether we ought to radio

the boats. What do you say about it, Mick?"

"Why not? The man must have spent a fair time in the States to have developed his accent. I'll write out a description for you, and you can have it pushed out to the boats. In any event, you've got nothing to lose, and it can't take much time because you're only interested in any boat that sailed in the last, say, eight hours. I wonder what luck the men have had at the house? Maybe they've done better than we have."

"I don't see that they can have done much worse," said Parker. He was getting tired and disgruntled.

Parker did not like routine work.

The squad returned from Hampstead. They were not very enthusiastic. The Superintendent laid a few papers on the Chief's desk, and commented :

"I don't think much of them, but this is the best

we managed to do."

Mick bent over the Chief's shoulder and started to

examine them. They were not very helpful. One after another they turned them over. It was Mick who suddenly bent forward and picked up the corner of an envelope. The remainder of the envelope had been burnt. Oddly enough, it was only the stamp that remained. It bore the postmark, Herne Hill.
"Did you happen to find this in the fireplace,

Super?" he inquired.

"Yes; he had burnt a bit of stuff before he pulled out, but this was the only thing left intact. I thought it might be useful some day. Even a humble postmark has been known to trip a man up before now, Mick."

"Very many times. And I've always got a great interest in anything that's burnt by a man who is taking it on the lam. I think that—"

The telephone bell rang, and the Chief raised the receiver. A moment later he beckoned to Mick Cardby and pushed the instrument over to him. The men around the table waited silently. Mick was replying entirely in monosyllabics. Suddenly a smile spread over his face, and he reached across the desk to seize a pencil and a piece of paper. He scribbled for a moment, uttered his profuse thanks, and then laid down the receiver.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "I don't want to raise any false hopes in you, but I think we might have the lead we've been waiting for. That was the Hendon expert on the line. By using the fluoroscope he has managed to raise what bit of printing there was on that piece of burnt paper. It may not be of great assistance, but Cuthbert Kendal must have been scared of it, or he would never have burnt it. I think you'll

agree."

"Don't keep us in suspense, Mick," said the Chief.

"What is the printing?"

Mick was enjoying his moment, and he hesitated

before replying:

"There is a heading: 'The General Safe Deposit, 67a Leadenhall Street.' But much more importantly there are the numbers at the top of the piece of paper: '87/392.' So, gentlemen, what have we? Something. at any rate."

"This," said the Chief, "is the point at which we

get cracking."

"Well, I'll be damned!" shouted Cardby senior, "and I thought all the time that Mick was pulling my leg about his damned fluoroscope."

The son sat back with a happy smile. Parker

coughed unnecessarily.

## CHAPTER TWENTY

#### THE BREAK AT LAST

"THE trouble is," said Mick, "that those offices will be closed down for a certainty. Pity, isn't it? I'd hate to leave this job until the morning."

"Don't worry about that, Mick," said the Chief. "I reckon the Yard can open any offices in this country if the cause is sufficiently grave. I'm going to telephone the managing director of the General Safe Deposit, and if he doesn't do what I want done he'll finish up in the cells. Will one of you get the man's name and telephone number for me? There is bound to be a night staff at a place of that size."

Mick paced around the room. He was feeling like ten men, delighted that his hundred-to-one shot seemed to have produced a winner. His father patted him on the shoulder, and so did the reluctant Sergeant Parker. Mick decided to celebrate, and left the room to buy himself a drink. He felt that he deserved one. His father accompanied him. When they returned they found the Chief Constable alone. The other officers had retired to their own offices. The Chief at once

said to Mick: "I'm glad you came back so soon, son. Walters, the managing director of the General Safe Deposit, will be here at any moment now. I'd like you and your father to meet him. Bless me, Mick, but if you're not careful, I can see you ending up as a full-blown detective. A

smart job indeed!"

Five minutes later Walters, a fat and pompous man,

bustled into the office. It did not take the Chief long to explain the position, and it certainly did not take Walters long to assure them that they were on a winner. He explained that every receipt, every withdrawal, everything they use in the General building was working on a complicated checking system. Nothing was released without them holding proof. In their office, he said, they held the counterfoil for every chit issued by them. If they had got hold of the numbers correctly the office staff would soon be able to tell them everything they wanted to know about that piece of paper. He suggested that ten o'clock on the following morning would be a suitable time at which to investigate the matter.

"Such a time would be very little use to us," said the Chief at once. "We are pursuing a criminal—a double murderer—and this piece of paper is the only clue we have as to his whereabouts. By ten o'clock in the morning that man might be a thousand miles away. I'm sorry, Mr. Walters, but we can't waste precious

time like that. I insist upon speed."

"There is nothing I can do for you at such a time as this," insisted Walters. "The staff is now dispersed, and I couldn't possibly gather them together again. The matter must be left until the morning, gentlemen."

The Chief saw that Mick Cardby wished to speak.

He waved his hand.

"I want to get this straight," said Mick. "Is your filing system so grotesquely involved and complicated that no one person in the whole building understands it? Is that what you wish us to understand?"

"I don't mean that at all," replied Walters testily.
"I merely said our staff had gone home, and since they are so scattered I could not recall them. In the morning

they will be placed at your immediate services."

"I'm not satisfied," persisted Mick. "Let me state an hypothetical case. Assume that I have a deposit with you. Assume that I lose my memory. In the daytime while all the staff is on the premises I call, show you a piece of paper, and say that I wish to have my mind refreshed as to what it is all about. In that case, Mr. Walters, what would be the procedure?"

"The paper would be handed to a clerk from the proper department, and you would very soon be given the information you were seeking."

"Splendid!" said Mick. "That is all I wanted to know. Mr. Walters, we do not require your staff, and we do not desire your staff. All that we want at the moment-I use your words-is a clerk from the proper department. He, you assure us, would very soon give us the information we are seeking. If one person can do the necessary work for us we don't want two. That leaves you with a most simple task. Get in touch with the head of that department, and tell him we want one competent clerk. After that you have only to ensure that we enter the premises without any difficulty, and we will cause you no further trouble or heartaches."

The Chief Constable was smiling broadly. Mr. Walters certainly was not. He could not extricate himself from the position, and borrowed the Chief's telephone with ill grace. He made the call. Mick did not take much notice of the conversation. But he was emphatically interested when Walters slammed down

the receiver, jumped to his feet, and said:

"The chief of that department will attend to the matter personally. He informs you that he will be awaiting you outside the main entrance at nine o'clock. I take it that I may now leave the building, gentlemen?"

"Surely," said the Chief, "and thanks for your

ready assistance."

Walters muttered something undistinguishable, and

marched out.

The Chief Constable sent out an officer for three drinks. Cardby senior referred to that amazing performance in later days as the most staggering achievement by any Chief ever known at the Yard.

"I don't think it would pay for a host of us to descend on the place at Leadenhall Street," said Mick. "Once we have got the information we can hold a brief conference here before we make any sort of a move."

"I can't very well disagree with you tonight,

Mick," said the Chief. "I will come along with you

to those offices, and then we can return here."

They travelled along together. The head of the department had adhered to his promise. He was waiting for them. Once they entered the premises, Mick speedily explained the position. The departmental head was much more obliging than the managing director. He took the numbers at once, and scurried off into the rear regions. Within five minutes he returned. It was apparent that the man was proud of his system. He was throwing out his chest as he laid a paper on the desk, and informed them:

"Here is all you wish to know, gentlemen. I have the counterfoil for this burnt voucher. It was issued to Mr. Nevill Grayson, of Keldon House, Half Moon Lane, Herne Hill, on the occasion when he made an addition to his deposit, and the date is March 8th of this year. That, at the moment, is all that I can tell

you. I trust it will be of some use to you."

"I have no doubt whatever that we can use the information," said Mick. "By the morning we would like to have every conceivable detail you can obtain for us about Mr. Grayson's deposit. I assume that by then the Chief Constable will be furnished with a search

warrant."

"You can bet your life I will be!" said the Chief, forgetting the usual dignity of his speech and his position. They marched out of the place together, and made quick time on their way back to the Yard. Quickly they gathered together the senior officers, and the position was explained.

"Will one of you suggest the best way in which to take the man?" asked the Chief. "I confess I have

worked out no method myself."

"I'd like to make a suggestion," said Mick. "Telephone the police at Herne Hill, and tell them that the Divisional Detective Inspector is required here immediately. That man knows the district, and most probably knows Keldon House. He is the proper man to give advice."

The seven men round the table nodded their heads like automata, and the call was made. It was while

they awaited the officer that another thought flashed across Mick's mind, and he jumped to his feet

excitedly:

"You can take a bet that we're on the winner," he said. "I've only just thought about the piece of envelope the Super found in the fireplace. It carried the Herne Hill postmark! I don't think we can go wrong now."

The Herne Hill Inspector arrived, and the Chief laid the facts before him. The men awaited the verdict silently. The Inspector was a cautious man, and he was in no hurry to reply. Mick became restive.

"I know the house quite well," he replied. "It stands in its own grounds about a couple of hundred yards away from the junction of Half Moon Lane and Herne Hill. It is a private hotel, and has a very good reputation locally. I know a few people who live there, but I've never heard of the man Grayson. The hotel caters for the more prosperous type of business men and their families. It is almost purely residential, and I believe that they have no casual callers. That must mean that the man has taken up his residence there. I can't tell you much more."

"If you wanted to take a man out of there," said Mick, "what would you do? Your knowledge of the

hotel should be useful to us, Inspector."

"Naturally, I should enter the hotel, go up to his room, and arrest him."

Mick smiled somewhat. So did a few of the other

men. Mick remarked:

"The man we are after could never be arrested in quite that way. He is wanted for two murders, and wouldn't have any compunction about adding to the list very substantially. How would you collect that man?"

"I can see that in such a case you would have to

use some strategy."

"That's precisely why you were asked to call here," said the Chief. "I am anxious to use your local knowledge. What strategy would you use?"
"I'll have to have a little time in which to consider

the matter."

"Think it over for five minutes, and then give us your idea of things."

The meeting adjourned, but not for long. The

Inspector had worked it out.

"I don't know what you will think of this plan, but I believe that it would work. I know the manageress of Keldon House. I can telephone her from a public call box, and tell her that I wish to meet her farther down Half Moon Lane for a few minutes. Also, of course, I'd tell her to inform no one why she was leaving the hotel. When I saw her I'd lay my cards on the table, and ask her for details about the position of this man's room. Finally, I'd request her to pass over to me the master key for all doors. So far it could be done most easily."

"I would then get about four men to enter the hotel, and make straight for the bedroom. But before I did that I would throw a cordon round the place in the grounds. The men entering the bedroom would have to take all the risk. Still, I can see no flaw in that arrangement, and I can see no reason why it shouldn't work out perfectly. I leave it for you all to consider, and if you want any local knowledge—well, here I am."

It seemed quite natural that the Chief Constable

should look at Mick.

"I congratulate the Inspector," he said without hesitation. "His plan is very simple, but I consider that probably the simplicity of it is the main attraction. You can't get any unexpected complications with a scheme like that. I would like to suggest one amendment. I don't agree that it would pay to throw a cordon round the entire house. Kendal is amazingly astute. If you used such a number of men he would know at once that something was afoot. I would suggest instead that a couple of men should be posted beneath the bedroom window to watch the drainpipes, and any other means of escape. I'd leave a man outside each outer door, and a final man near the entrance gate. I fancy that would be ample."

The Inspector from Herne Hill nodded his head

without delay.

"I take it that we are all agreed," said the Chief.

"In that case we can make a start at once. We will want to borrow two of your local men, not uniformed men, Inspector. They can cover the front of the house. I'd like Mick Cardby to take the bedroom with whoever he would care to choose, and I will place the other men. I think, Inspector, that you ought to be with Cardby, since you will have a clear idea of the position of the room. We will all park in a car at the end of Croxted Road. When you have fixed up everything with the manageress, you can report to us at once, Inspector, and then we can make the final arrangements on the spot. I must warn all you men to take arms. Kendal will fire immediately if he realises what is happening. Are we all set to make a move?"

They were. The men filed out silently. They knew they were handling a tough job. Mick and his father walked out together. The older man said:

"Don't forget that he'd rather kill you, Mick, than all the other men put together. He'd reckon that

your murder was well worth swinging for."

"I've got that fact very much on my mind, Dad. One other matter. For the love of God, don't you join the party to bust into the bedroom. One from the family is enough. I'd be worried stiff if you were by my side."

It seemed to Mick that he had sat in the crowded police car for hours and hours. Probably he had been waiting for a little more than half an hour before the

local Inspector rejoined them to announce:

"Everything is ready. I have got the master key here, and I know exactly where to find the bedroom. Now, what are the final arrangements?"

"On which floor is the bedroom placed?" asked Mick.

"On the second floor. I'd say that it would be about thirty-five feet above the ground. You couldn't jump without injuring yourself." "Have you got your own two men ready and waiting for us?" asked the Chief.

"They are fifty yards farther down the road. They are good men."

"Right," said the Chief. "The next question is left

with you, Mick. Who do you intend taking with you, apart from the Inspector here?"

"I'd like Superintendent Mason and Inspector Ellis,

if they agree."

Both men agreed without demur. Mick knew them

well. They could take it!

"I'll make the other arrangements," said the Chief.
"I'll stay beneath the bedroom window with Mr. Cardby senior. We will want to be shown our position a few minutes before you enter the hotel. You should be able to show us the spot, Inspector, before you enter with the other men. Did the manageress say anything to you about this man? Did she mention whether he was in bed, or tell you anything of what he was doing?"

"Yes, she said he had been in his bedroom all evening, and had even had his evening meal served up

there. He told her he wasn't feeling well."

"That sounds promising. Inspector Knight, take Sergeant Parker, and cover the front of the hotel.

There's nothing further to be said."

"Except," remarked Mick, "that this is the moment when we should all tumble out of this car, and use our feet. I'll stroll on ahead with the local Inspector. He will take me to the hotel. If you all follow you can't very well go wrong. I wish you all the very best of luck. Happy hunting, and don't forget that you've never tried to collect a worse man."

The procession filed away. A church clock was chiming eleven. Cardby noticed the crescent moon scudding through the clouds, and felt grateful for it. Five minutes later he was standing inside the entrance gates of Keldon House. Mick was drawing in deep breaths of air. He felt that very soon he might be needing to use his lungs!

At ten minutes past eleven they marched through the

hotel entrance.

#### CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

#### CURTAINS FOR CUTHBERT

THE residents in the hotel had vanished to their bedrooms, or were in a card room. The four men passed through the empty entrance lounge, and the Inspector led the way up the stairs. Cardby strode by his side. The Yard men noticed with a shiver that Mick had already drawn his gun. On the first landing they paused for an instant. Only a dim light was glowing, and it required a moment before the Inspector got his bearings. He proceeded slowly up the second flight of stairs.

"The door facing the end of the stairs," he whispered.

"Are you ready?"

The three men with him said nothing. They all thought it was a damned silly question. They reached the top stair, and stepped over the narrow passage. Certainly, the owners of Keldon House were not profligate with their lights. The Inspector beckoned Mick to stand immediately behind him. Slowly inserted the key in the lock. Cardby touched the Inspector on the shoulder, and pressed him down. He wanted a chance of firing over the man immediately the door was flung back. Mick was wildly wondering where they would find the light switch in the room. Without it they could easily commence firing at each other in the middle of a fight.

Cardy heard a door creak some little distance away. For a moment he wondered whether it was the door of Kendal's bedroom. Mick felt almost uncomfortably calm. He wished the Inspector would put a jerk into

it.

The door was flung back with something of a crash, and the Inspector jumped forward. Mick followed him. The room was in darkness. He heard the Inspector call out, and Mick turned to grope for a light switch. It was at that moment that his heart missed a couple

of beats. He heard a rush of feet in the passage outside, a loud oath, and a crash as someone hit the ground. Cardby hesitated for a fraction of a second. Something had gone badly wrong with the arrangements. But what?

"Mick! Mick!" he heard the startled call. The voice was Mason's. Cardby rushed out of the bedroom, and almost fell over Inspector Ellis. The officer was lying on the floor of the corridor. Mason was racing down the stairs. Mick risked his neck by following the Super, taking two steps at a time in spite of the dark. At the foot of the stairs he reached Mason. And for the first time Mick noticed the dim figure of a man who was just vanishing round the corner to the left. Mason called out:

"There he goes, Mick! That's him. Come along!"
Mick left the Superintendent behind. He tried a snap shot at the dim form at the far end of the passage. He missed. Kendal did not fire. The man raced to the end of the passage, and suddenly there was a crash of glass. Cuthbert Kendal had taken a nose-dive through the low window in the angle of the wall. Mick held his arms over his head, and followed him through the window. He had no idea where he might land. He arrived on the edge of a lawn. The jolt shook some breath from his body, and jarred his elbows. Kendal was already on his feet. Cardby tried another shot. He missed again. He dare not stop to take aim carefully.

Kendal had cut away across the lawn. The man was cute enough even when shaken to avoid the main drive and the entrance gates. Cardby could not let him get far away. The feet pounding on the lawn made very little noise, and visibility was limited to some thirty feet. Cardby reached the edge of the grounds in time to see Kendal toppling from the top of an adjoining wall. He wondered whether he would be waiting for him at the other side. There wasn't time to start counting risks and chances. Cardby cut his hands on the glass embedded in the top of the wall as he mounted it. Kendal has gained a bit of space, but now Mick could hear his feet scratching on

gravel. He must have found the drive of the neighbouring house. Mick, too, soon found it. Kendal shot through the open entrance gate with a lead of ten

yards. He twisted round towards Herne Hill.

They raced along the pavement. Cardby could make very little impression on the space between them. Most men can develop speed when they are running for their lives. At the corner of the road an L.G.O.C. 'bus was ambling past. Kendal dived in front of it as though determined to commit suicide. The driver braked with a curse, and Mick sped round the front of the 'bus in time to find Kendal heading across the corner of Dulwich Road. Mick groaned when he saw the move. Instantly the man's idea became plain. He was trying to reach the wide, open space of Brockwell Park. Mick tried yet another shot. He found it impossible to take a reasonable aim while racing at top speed. Kendal reached the park. Cardby wondered when the man was going to stand up and fight. Maybe he hadn't yet discovered that only one person was following him. Cardby was sure that when that fact registered on Kendal's mind he would run no more.

A few courting couples in the park were roused from their love affairs by the mad chase. Cardby even thought of calling out for the man to be stopped. He would not. He knew that the unfortunate person who made the attempt would be murdered for a certainty. The pace began to tell. Mick was finding the going heavy. His fight at Islington had done nothing to give him renewed health. They were almost across Brockwell Park. Cardby was concerned to know whether Cuthbert Kendal was running blindly. Or was he running with a certain knowledge and a plan in his

head?

Once the man reached the other side of the park he could work his way through the network of streets behind Brixton Hill. And that would mean that Cardby would have to risk a bullet each time he turned a corner. It was not a happy thought. Kendal cut down through the end of the park into Water Lane, and swung to the left. So he was moving towards Brixton Hill. Cardby tried to crowd on the pace. He

knew that he couldn't last out for much longer. The man in front of him seemed to have the stamina of a madman, the strength donated by a desperate

despair.

Along Water Lane a policeman on patrol spread out his arms to hold Cuthbert Kendal. Until that moment Mick was not sure whether or not the man carried a gun. Now his doubts were all dispelled. He heard the crack of a revolver, and the policeman collapsed on the pavement. Mick jumped over the squirming man, and continued the chase.

At the corner of Water Lane the fleeing man turned to the right to race down the Brixton Hill. Kendal was still making fast time. Cardby was becoming desperate. A hundred yards down the hill another policeman sighted Kendal, and dashed over from the far side of the road to cut him off. Again the gun barked, and the constable lurched along the gutter before falling on the edge of the road.

They were not more than a hundred yards away from Brixton Town Hall, when Cuthbert Kendal made his first stand. Cardby wondered why the man's pace had slackened. He soon knew the reason. A car was standing against the kerb. Kendal wheeled round, took a shot at Cardby, and then jumped over the edge of the car into the driving seat. It was an astute move. Cardby could only see the man's head and shoulders. The back of the car hid the rest from view. Even while Kendal pressed on the self-starter he continued to fire. Cardby was forced to crouch against a wall. One of the bullets fanned past his cheek.

The car started to move. Cardby took deliberate aim, and for the first time he registered a hit. One of the rear tyres exploded with a bang, and the car started to wobble. The wobble meant nothing to Cuthbert Kendal, and the car began to gather speed. Another car was travelling down the Hill. Mick jumped into the road and stretched out his arms. The driver pulled to a stop. He was the only person in

the car.

The unfortunate driver received the shock of his life. Cardby knew he dare waste no time. He bent

over the side of the car, gripped the driver by the collar, pulled him clean out of the car, shouted "Sorry!" and was away before the owner of the car had picked himself up. Kendal took the sharp bend into Acre Lane on two wheels. Mick followed him, and missed by inches a policeman who had stepped

into the road to bar his progress.

At last, the luck was with Cardby. He had stolen a real car, and he sighed relievedly as he felt the engine pulling sweetly. At the corner of King's Avenue the leading car missed an omnibus by a miracle, driving within inches of the front wheels. The omnibus stopped. Mick swung the wheel, climbed up on the pavement, and then down again. Kendal ran on. He was heading towards Clapham Common. Cardby made no attempt to use his gun. He had thrown it on the seat by his side. It needed both hands to handle a car on that insane drive. People on the pavements stared at them with wide open eyes. Twice Cardby heard police whistles blowing.

Kendal reached the main road at Clapham Common. The man was driving like a maniac, and he made no attempt to slow down. He managed to get across, and Mick was forced to follow at the same pace. He dented the mudguard of a passing car. He barely had time to see Kendal careering crazily round a corner as he headed for the Wandsworth Road. Mick felt the car lurching badly as he took the angle at better than fifty miles an hour. He was fighting against a

wheel that bucked in his hands.

One of them must crash soon, thought Cardby. It was impossible to get through London at this pace without a smash. But who would smash? On the Wandsworth Road Kendal set an even more furious pace. Cardby set his teeth, and smacked his foot down until it touched the floorboard. The car was taking all he could give it. But he was gaining. There could be no doubt about that fact. Cardby's car was quickly picking up on the straight run. Suddenly he sensed instinctively what Kendal meant to do.

The man was going to swing round over Vauxhall Bridge, get into the labyrinth of streets at Victoria,

abandon the car, and make a run for it.

Cardby decided that the time had arrived to stage a real "hit or bust" act. He dare not let the man reach the maze of streets behind Victoria Station. There, he was sure, he would lose him. He was not more than five yards behind when they drew near Vauxhall Bridge. It did not seem possible that any person would try to take the bend at the pace at which Kendal was travelling. Cardby gambled everything on the man taking the chance. He pulled in close to the kerb on the left of the road, and smacked down his foot until it hurt. Cuthbert Kendal did not look to see what was happening behind. He wrenched the wheel in an effort to get the car round the sharp corner.

Cardby had got almost alongside him, and as Kendal's car bucked and swung, as two wheels came off the ground, Mick got his wheel interlocked with Kendal's rear wheel. Both men jerked their wheels to the right to avoid crashing into the bridge. They struck the corner of the pavement, and swayed crazily. Cardby thought the steering wheel was going to be ripped from his hands. They left the pavement and rocked for a few yards along the Albert Embankment. Cardby muttered a swift prayer, and swung the wheel the full limit to the right. For an instant it seemed that even that move would not stop the cars. But suddenly there was a grating crash, and Kendal's car began to heel over. Cardby found that his car had run out of control. His front wheel was still locked. Actually, it was the only thing keeping Kendal's car slightly on the road. But the lurch on the car was too great for any further control, and it jumped over still more. There was a crash that could have been heard half a mile away.

Kendal's car slid along on its side for fifty yards. Cardby expected it to somersault at any moment. His own car was rocking perilously, but he no longer had the wheel locked. He pulled back the brake, and grabbed for his gun. The action of braking was more than his car could stand. It teetered on two wheels for a moment, and then fell over on its side. Cardby was flung out of the driver's seat, and half across the road. He rolled over half a dozen times, and arrived in the gutter on the far side.

He shook the haze from his brain, clambered to his feet, and started to run. Kendal was still trying to extricate himself from the car. He was pointed in the

Cardby's first shot struck him in the right shoulder. There was no second shot. Instead, Mick Cardby used

the butt of his gun. It was all over.

The men who returned from Herne Hill to Scotland Yard still tell the story of that night, of Mick Cardby's mad fight with a racing death. They tell the story, too, of how Kendal had left a bedroom, and visited a lavatory a few yards along the passage only a couple of minutes before the police arrived at his hotel door. They tell, too, of the party thrown at the Castor Club in honour of Mick Cardby, and of many such things.

There is one story, however, they never tell, because they know nothing about it. Six weeks after the crash on the Albert Embankment, the man known to all as Cuthbert Kendal took his early breakfast, and the long drop. He had paid. On the following Sunday morning an elderly couple sat taking their breakfast in Wolverhampton. The mother had just been reading the story of the hanging of Cuthbert Kendal. Suddenly she sprang to her feet, clutched her husband savagely by the arm, and pointed to a large photograph of the double murderer.

"Dad!" she screamed, "That's our Archie. I'm

sure that it must be Archie!"

The father looked up for an instant, gazed at the photograph, and said:

"Aye, that's him all right. Pass me some of that

butter, Lizzie."

# WHITE CIRCLE NOVELS

List of titles in preparation, for the Welfare General in India

## CRIME CLUB

The Beast Must Die Calling All Cars Malice In Wonderland Where There's A Will The House Of Shadows The Sixteenth Stair Evil Under The Sun Nicholas Blake
Henry Holt
Nicholas Blake
Rex Stout
J. Jefferson Farjeon
E. C. R. Lorac
Agatha Christie

## MYSTERY NOVELS

The Urgent Hangman Miss Dynamite Ironsides' Lone Hand Danger Zone Dames Don't Care Crime Unlimited Island Alert Peter Cheyney
Berkeley Gray
Victor Gunn
J. M. Walsh
Peter Cheyney
David Hume
J. M. Walsh

## WESTERNS

The Crimson Horseshoe
The Man From Peace River
Bought With A Gun
Wandering Cowboy
Rustlers On The Loose
The Last Bullet
Barbed Wire

Peter Dawson
Wallace Q. Reid
Luke Short
Charles W. Sanders
Frank C. Robertson
Tex Curran
Gary Marshall

## GENERAL

Rural Amateur Return To The River Clifford Hornby Roderick Haig-Brown